

## **FROM INTEGRATION TO INCLUSION: THE CHALLENGING ROLE OF LEARNING SUPPORT TEACHERS**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The placement of students with special educational needs in general school is either termed as Integration or Inclusion, and we often use the words 'integration' and 'inclusion' as synonymous. In some countries, the idea of inclusive education is still perceived as serving children with disabilities within general education settings. This study explores the perceptions and beliefs associated with the contemporary practices of Integration model among general education teachers (in rural India), and suggests how it is contradicting with the actual conceptualisation of Inclusive model. Initially, this study is aimed at exploring the current beliefs and practices of integration model in order to identify the issues related within the model through case study approach. Results indicate that the integration model develops a kind of belief system among teachers that, students with severe learning difficulties may develop socialization skills but there is little or no scope of academic improvement in any case. Moreover, the integration model has no scope in encouraging the teachers to see far beyond the ability based practices. This study further extends itself in outlining the challenges on the role of learning support teacher in addressing the identified issues.

**KEYWORDS:** Students with Special Needs, Learning Support Teachers, Special Education Teachers, Integration Model, and Inclusive Education

### **INTRODUCTION**

#### **Background**

Research from the past 25 years has consistently demonstrated that learners with special educational needs experience positive learning outcomes when placed in general education classrooms. This transition in broader terms, involved a step by step movement from exclusion to special education, then emphasising on integration, and finally, to the idea of inclusive education (Ainscow, Dyson and Weiner, 2014). Inevitably, the pace of this transition varies from country to country and as a result, in some countries, the idea of inclusive education is still perceived as serving children with disabilities within general education settings (Mittler, 2005). The placement of those learners with special educational needs in general school is either termed as Integration or Inclusion, and "we often use the words 'integration' and 'inclusion' as synonymous. This is not helpful and it would be useful if we could agree what we mean by each of these" (Reiser and O'Mahony, 2002).

Many forms of integration such as locational integration (learners with disability are in same site as their other non-disabled peers), social integration (attending discrete courses and socialising in canteen), and functional integration (joint participation in educational programmes with back up support from special educators), assume some form of assimilation of learners with disabilities in an educational setting which remains largely unchanged (Reiser and Mahony,

2002). The critical problem with functional integration is that, in case of any withdrawal of support from a special educator, it has been found that the general education teachers feel they can no longer cope up with learners with special needs (Ainscow, Dyson and Weiner, 2014). The pertinent issue with the integration approach is its practices are dependent on special education/educator in such a way that, the presence of special educator as a back up support teacher prepares the general education teacher to feel less responsible over the students with special needs. In addition, it has been argued that the pre-occupation with individualised responses which is a feature of special education focuses more on individualized education plans rather than creating forms of teaching which could reach out to all learners (Ainscow, 1997) and this eventually tends to foster yet more forms of segregations among learners (in terms of abilities) despite having good intentions. Furthermore, the existence of specialised pedagogies marginalises and excludes learners with moderate to severe difficulties (Lewis and Norwich, 2005). The main criterion for eligibility for special education services, then, has been proof of intrinsic deficit. Indeed, the integration approach focuses on deficit/medical model which aims to fix disabilities through remediation (Mittler, 2003). In many countries, this integrated approach is misunderstood as inclusive approach (Mittler, 2005).

On the contrary, Inclusive approach is moving away from the negative discourse of the 'deficit/medical model' and beginning to celebrate individuality by adapting the 'social model'. According to Mittler (2003), the inclusive approach emphasises the changes in educational system as a whole which involves reformation of curriculum and teaching methods, and nature of grouping the children so as to provide opportunities for all to learn together. Tomlinson (1996) clearly differentiates both approaches as, on the one hand, integration approach is offering courses of education and training and then providing additional human or physical aids to some students who are labelled as having learning difficulties in order to gain access to those courses, and, on the other hand, inclusive approach is redesigning the very process of learning, assessment and organisation so that it fits the objectives and learning styles of all students irrespective of students' ability. In addition Tomlinson (1996) also mentions that emphasis of inclusive approach is either introducing new content to courses, or ensuring differentiated access to the same content; or both. Its central tendency is "opening of opportunities to those whose disability means that they learn differently from others" (Tomlinson, 1996, p.4). This approach is increasingly seen broadly as a reform that responds to diversity of all learners (UNESCO, 2001), and the practices are based on effective teaching for all children instead of focusing on fixing the disabilities of a particular group of children.

Moreover, the two different approaches have its own tendency to form certain belief system among general education teachers. Jordan (2007), characterised general education teachers' beliefs about working with students with special needs as lying along a continuum in which, at one end there are teachers with Interventionist beliefs, and at other end there are teachers with Pathognomonic beliefs. Interventionist teachers are those who feel responsibilities themselves for removing barriers for inclusion and ensuring students' access towards learning, whereas teachers with pathognomonic beliefs (path = disease, gnomon = naming the pathology) view the internal condition of a student as stable, characterized by medical-pathological condition, and not amendable to instructional intervention. In addition, teachers with Interventionist beliefs have higher level of efficacy about their teaching, maintain overall classroom effectiveness, and provide instructions to both students with and without special needs at higher levels of cognitive development (Jordan and Stanovich, 2003), whereas teachers with Pathognomonic beliefs expect diagnosticians to label a student and handing over the responsibilities to a specialist to treat them outside the classroom, and tends to provide managerial interactions rather than instructional interactions. Hence, integrated approach is characterised by pathognomonic beliefs, whereas inclusive

approach is characterised by Interventionist beliefs.

Though the differences between two models are clearly explained in literature, international research suggests that when it comes to practice, there is as yet no single model for effective provision (Rose and O'Neill, 2009). As described earlier, in some countries the models are mixed up and there is lack of consensus for a single effective model. Though specialized pedagogies presumably focus on deficit/medical model and further marginalise and exclude learners with special needs, one cannot diminish the need for specialised expertise (Davis and Florian, 2004) as inclusive approach requires a substantial amount of support from specialized service providers. Also from a legislative, moral, and efficacy standpoint, the general education classroom is now the placement of choice for students with disabilities and these earlier descriptors of inclusion clearly framed it as a special education issue. Hence, shifting the whole approach from integration to inclusion is critical as it was about 'separateness of special education (medical model) versus 'belongingness with general education' (social model). Reframing inclusion using a larger universal design rubric may move the practice away from the "separateness of special education" to the "belongingness of general education" (Sailor, 2002). However, Mittler (2003) suggests building bridges between special education and general education is crucial for informing effective inclusion, and while general and special education may have a shared agenda, to a certain extent, "the separateness of special education" still exists.

## **NEED FOR INVESTIGATION**

As previously mentioned, collaboration between general and special education is crucial for effective inclusion; to an extent, the role of support teacher (special educator or teaching assistant) is a critical factor for the promotion of inclusive schooling. Rose and O'Neill (2009) suggests that the literature in this area identifies the supportive roles not only varies from country to country, but also varies within countries. Also, the significant increase in the number of adults playing supportive roles in general schools had lead to different models of support across countries and few of them have been subjected to scrutiny (Rose and O'Neill, 2009). Farrell and Balshaw (2002) reported that 'teaching assistants can make special education inclusive' when they were valued as partners within classroom teams led by teachers who were committed to collaboration. Though literature prevail best practices of collaboration especially in co-teaching, Scruggs et al. (2007) reported that the instructional techniques employed in co-teaching practice did not reflecting the best practices. Also results from Murawski and Swanson (2001) suggests that co-teaching on many occasions falls short of realizing its potential for delivering quality services to students in general education classrooms. Further, the international research points out that an understanding of what constitutes the most effective forms of support is yet to emerge (Giangreco & Doyle 2007; Farrell, Balshaw & Polat 2000; French 2001 as cited in Rose and O'Neill, 2009).

Moreover, there are numerous evidences around the literature emphasising that the perceptions, attitudes and beliefs of general education teacher are the other most critical factors for shifting the approach from integration to inclusion. Even the most advanced pedagogical methods are more likely to be ineffective among those teachers, who implicitly or explicitly subscribe to a belief system that regards learners with special needs as deficient, need of fixing, worse and therefore, beyond fixing (Ainscow, 2006). In most countries, general education teachers continue to report that they are not properly prepared to include students with special needs as they lack confidence in their knowledge and skills in special education (Bennet, 2009). Many teacher candidates expressed the need for mandatory and extended studies in special education within their pre-service education programs (Woloshyn, Bennett, and Berrill, 2003). Hence, another important aspect is the lack of expertise among general education teachers in responding to diversified learners, remains a

big challenge for effective inclusion. However, despite lack of preparation in pre-service program, general education teachers who holds positive beliefs are effectively teaching students with special needs still exists (Jordan, Lindsay and Stanovich, 1997). In addition to training in special education provinces, general education teachers are also concerned about classroom management issues, collaboration of general and special education teachers, and lack of resources and support, as these acts as barriers to inclusion (Bennet, 2009).

As studies (Blatchford et al. (2007) & Black-Hawkins et al. (2007)) suggest that classroom support when well deployed can be a critical factor in enabling all students to engage in learning, researchers are advised to explore the conditions necessary for inclusion with caution because currently it is not the case that one size fits all, and our understanding of what influences an effective classroom support remains as a topic in need of further investigation (Rose and O’Neill, 2009). Though the integration approach once was seen as an opportunity for students with special needs, it has also been criticized as providing restrictive environment for them (Mittler, 2003) through various factors such as teachers’ negative beliefs, teachers’ lack of competence in addressing students with special needs, and ineffective collaborative practices. It is not ambiguous that the belief system of general education teachers has greater influence towards their classroom practices which in turn reflects the effectiveness of collaborative practices. Thus this study aims to explore the current beliefs and practices of integration model in order to identify the issues related within the model through a case study approach. The scope of the study further extends itself in outlining the challenges on the role of learning support teacher in addressing those identified issues. In other words, this study aims to answer the following research questions.

- What are the current practices and beliefs of general education teachers in the integration model with respect to teaching students with special needs?
- What are the challenges on the role of learning support teacher in adapting the inclusive model with respect to the beliefs of general education teachers?

## THE STUDY

The study is conducted in an integrated school situated in the rural part of south India. The school is operated under the management of a disability social service organisation for more than 20 years and for the past 10 years the school has adapted the integration approach with 64 numbers of students with special educational needs currently integrated in both primary and secondary sections. This case study is conducted in the primary section of the school with 3 teachers who were said to be the best among all teachers in teaching students with special educational needs even in the absence of a support staff. These 3 teachers were chosen for this study after considering with a support staff who described them as the most experienced teachers in the first place. Initially classroom observations for 7 days were conducted by the researcher for all the three teachers followed by a semi structured interview which was taken individually and audio recorded. Each classroom observation for all the three teachers Teacher A, Teacher B and Teacher C was conducted for an hour. During each observation, the frequencies of interaction of teachers and students with special educational needs were noted along with the type of interaction (academic or social) and duration of interaction with each and every student with special educational needs present in the classroom. Additional comments (if any) on each observation were also noted in an anecdotal way to obtain rich and descriptive data. After 7 observations of each teacher (21 observations in total) which

were observed in different times of the day, all the three teachers were interviewed separately about their demographic information, their opinions about special and inclusive education, their problems and successes, their training and expectations regarding training, their opinions about student placement and finally their opinions about the roles and responsibilities of a support staff and administrative support system.

The study was carried out in grade 4 (2 classrooms – 4<sup>th</sup> A section and 4<sup>th</sup> B section) and grade 5 (2 classrooms – 5<sup>th</sup> A section and 5<sup>th</sup> B section). There were 2 special educators in primary school who were working in grade 1, 2 and 3 as grades 1, 2 and 3 has new teachers. According to the principal's instruction, the two special educators were allocated to support the new teachers as grade 4 and grade 5 teachers were experienced and manage themselves. Occasionally the special educators visit grade 4 and 5 in case on the occurrence of any behavioural issues by any students with special needs. Observations were carried out in four different classrooms for each teacher. In almost all observation with the three teachers, the presence of a special educator were observed few times and if present, the special educator sits with the student with very low educational attainment and teach to write basic level alphabets and the name of the student. There were at least 2 students with very low educational attainment and 3 to 5 students with average educational attainment in each classroom.

## **FINDINGS**

### **Observation Data**

#### **Teacher A**

Observation data of *Teacher A* reflects that the teacher quite often interacts with students with special needs than with students without special needs. The overall frequency of interaction with students with average educational attainment were between 2 to 5 times in teacher A's case. Except for one day in which teacher A had more than 10 times of interaction with students with average educational attainment. It was also observed that the interactions of teacher A with students with average educational attainment were more academic and the students were working in the same curriculum as the rest of their peers. During those interactions, teacher a instructed appropriately, questioned and elaborated the response from students in almost all the days of observation. But when it comes to interacting with students with intellectual difficulties (otherwise called as very low educational attainment in this paper), the frequency of interaction of Teacher A is around 10 to 12 times. While taking lessons (lecturing or story telling), Teacher A was using pictures to convey the core ideas of the lessons with students with very low educational attainment. While giving some reading or writing activities to the whole class, teacher A (with no choice) was instructing the students with very low educational attainment to write very basic alphabets which is obviously very low when compared to the curriculum offered to their peers. Also, when there were two or more students with very low educational attainment, Teacher A interacts more with either one of the students. In few observation days, when Teacher A interacts with the first student with very low educational attainment for 10 times, it is noted that the teacher interacts with the second student with very low educational attainment for 6 times and almost no interaction with the third student with very low educational attainment. In all the 7 observations in Teacher A's classroom (in all 4 different classrooms), student with very low educational attainment were working with the same basic level alphabets, drawing shapes on boards, writing numbers from 1 to 10.

#### **Teacher B**

Observation data of Teacher B denotes that the teacher's approach is based on addressing the whole class and thus unlike teacher A, teacher B has few numbers of interactions with students with special needs. Peer tutoring and mentoring

is evident in teacher B's approach. Like teacher A, teacher B is also having problems if there are 2 or more number of students with low educational attainment i.e. if the frequency of interaction with first student with low educational attainment is 2 to 4 times, then the frequency of interaction with the second student with low educational attainment is either 1 or none in all observed days. But, unlike teacher A, teacher B's frequency of interaction with both students with low educational attainment and average educational attainment is almost same in most observational days (2 to 5 times). Another critical issue noted in teacher B's practices is that the teacher is instructing, questioning and elaborating students' response in every student with average educational attainment, but elaborating the response of students with low educational attainment was not observed in any of the observational days. On one of the observational day of teacher B, there were only one student with special needs present and the student was with low educational attainment. During that day, the teacher gave writing activity to the rest of the peers and sat with the student with very low educational attainment for the remaining time (long time) to identify the strengths of the student's writing skills and even gave some social activities.

### **Teacher C**

Observational data from Teacher C's classroom denotes that if the teacher is having more interaction with students with low educational attainment on a particular hour, then the frequency of interaction with students with average educational attainment is less or almost none. In the same way, during other observational days, if the interaction with students with average educational attainment is more, then the frequency of interaction with students with average educational attainment is less or none. Like teacher A and B, teacher C is also having problems in addressing 2 or more students with low educational attainment. Teacher C's interaction with students with low educational attainment is leaning more towards social and behaviour improvements rather than academic. Instructing, questioning and elaborating the responses of students with average educational attainment were evident whereas questioning and elaborating the responses of students with low educational attainment were rarely observed. In all the 7 observations in Teacher C's classroom (in all 4 different classrooms), student with very low educational attainment were working with the same basic level alphabets, drawing shapes on boards, writing numbers from 1 to 10. The notable aspect of teacher C's practices is including all the students with low and average educational attainment in group activities like singing and dancing to the poems at the beginning of class.

### **Interview Data**

#### **Teacher A**

Interview data of teacher A seemingly confirms the observation data about the teacher's opinion on special education. Teacher A describes special education as "special education is about teaching basic numbers, shapes and alphabets to students with low intellectual abilities". The observation data confirms that teacher A was teaching basic numbers, shapes and alphabets to students with very low educational attainment. Teacher A's opinion about inclusive education lean more towards the improvements on social behaviour for students with special needs, and not so positive on academic achievement of students with severe learning difficulties. The success stories of Teacher A again deal with social awareness of students with severe learning difficulties and average academic achievement of few students with mild to moderate learning difficulties. The teacher is not very sure about the academic achievement of students with severe learning difficulties as those students will be handled by the teacher for only 2 years and after that they will be handled completely by secondary teachers. The main concern of teacher A in teaching in integrated setting is the inability of certain



students to read, write and follow instructions and also teacher A mentioned about the need of training the teachers on remediation strategies. When enquired about the educational goals of students with severe learning difficulties, teacher A points out that those students can be placed in regular school till 8<sup>th</sup> grade and continuing education after 8<sup>th</sup> grade is not possible as the curriculum demands more competencies involving higher intellect. On giving suggestions to new teachers, teacher A would like to advice new teachers to teach the students according to their ability and strengths though teacher A mentions that it is always better to identify the strengths and improving students' skills according to it. Teacher A's expectations from the support teacher (otherwise known as special teacher or teaching assistant) is to sit alongside of students with severe learning difficulties as it is not possible for the general education teachers to monitor all the students with special needs in integrated settings. This was well reflected in the observation data where the teacher having problems in addressing two or more students with low educational attainment. Teacher A is having negative opinion about students with low intellectual ability being placed in grade 4 or 5. Teacher A mentions that those students should be placed according to their IQ level, but also believes that there could be social adjustment problems if they were not placed according to their age. Regarding administration support, teacher A mentions that teachers need additional training and support as there was not enough support teachers to work with. With the class size of 25 to 30, it is merely impossible to teach all children without a support teacher or special educator. With the presence of special educators who are allocated to work with few teachers, it is always easy to build relationship with them to share ideas and knowledge.

### **Teacher B**

In teacher B's observational data, it was noted that the approach was based on whole class and it is reflected in interview data in such a way that teacher B's opinion about special education is, it should be given to the whole class where we have to stress importance to students with slow progression. Teacher B holds negative opinion about categorizing students with their disabilities such as MR (mentally retarded), CP (cerebral palsy), DS (down syndrome) etc., and teacher mentioned that the categorization should be based on IQ level of the students. Though teacher B holds a positive opinion about the concept of inclusive education, teacher B insists that when it comes to practice, it is not successful. Teacher B mentions that inclusive education on one hand seems promising by improving the social and behavioural skills for students with severe learning difficulties, but on the other hand fails to bring out academic achievement of those students. Teacher B also insists that the government should give different and simplified syllabus to general schools to teach students with severe learning difficulties as the regular syllabus is not suitable for those students. Teacher B's success story involves a student with mild learning difficulty who was showing slow rate of progression was able to cope up with the regular syllabus during the span of one year with the teacher. Teacher B mentioned the critical problems as, the inability to address the behavioural issues of some students and lack of group meetings among teachers regarding these issues. When enquired about the educational plans for students with special needs, teacher B mentioned about making the student to follow teacher's instruction first, and then plan for academic goals. Teacher B's concern is that if only the student's ability of following instruction is improved, the academic goals can then be set. On the areas of training, teacher B expresses interest towards training in behaviour modification method as the teacher feels adequate on teaching students with low IQ according to their IQ level. On giving suggestions to new teachers, teacher B mentions that the advice would be based on how to adapt the student towards the teacher. Teacher B strongly believes that if the student is well adapted towards the teacher and able to follow teacher's instruction, then it is easy for them to teach and plan for the students. The expectations of teacher B from support teacher is based on differentiated instruction methods. Teacher B wants the support teacher to note down certain things in the lesson which could be understandable by the students with

learning difficulties and share those notes with the teacher. Unlike teacher A, Teacher B strongly recommends that students with low educational attainment should be placed according to their IQ level and not by age category. Teacher B is ready to face and solve any social adjustment issues among kids when students with severe learning disabilities who are aged more than 10 or 12 and are still placed in grade 1 or 2. On administration support, teacher B insists more practical training to be given along with teaching materials. Teacher B wants the presence of support teacher while taking class and feels no need of a support teacher while giving any reading or writing activities.

### **Teacher C**

Teacher C's opinion about special education deals with the perception that it is about training children with severe difficulties in the area of activities of daily living until they are ready for integrating into the regular school. Same like teacher A, teacher C's opinion about inclusive education is that it provides an opportunity for students with disabilities to learn along with their peers and get improved in their social and behaviour skills. When enquired about the success story, Teacher C mentioned the same thing as mentioned by teacher A i.e. with the combined efforts of all teachers; few students' social and behavioural skills were improved though there were hardly any educational accomplishments for students with severe learning difficulties. Teacher C's problems in teaching in integrated settings reflects the lack of support teacher now and then. Teacher C concerns that it takes quite a long time to instruct slow learners and thus leaves other students to be unattended. This was very evident in teacher C's observational data where teacher C hardly finds time to instruct students with mild to moderate learning difficulties while teacher C instructs students with severe learning difficulties in a particular hour, or vice-versa. When asked about the educational plans, teacher C stresses that for students with severe learning difficulties, it is only possible to teach basic literacy and numerical skills as it will be helpful for them to excel in vocational training after grade 8 or 10 and to perform other social activities independently. Like teacher A, teacher C also mentioned about the need of training involving remediation strategies to improve reading and writing skills of students with moderate to severe learning difficulties. Teacher C's suggestions for new teachers are based on involving students with special needs in classroom activities. Expectations of teacher C from support teachers is they should sit alongside students with special needs while general teachers take classes and break down the concept or activities in simpler steps which will be accessible for students with special needs. Teacher C's opinion about student placement is they should be placed according to age category as the students may be emotionally disturbed when placed according to their IQ level. Teacher C is happy about the current administration support as it is a school managed by a disability service organisation which has many departments such as special school, early intervention centre to cater for students with special needs. Teacher C also mentioned that if it is an independent school, parents can be involved to support each other.

## **DISCUSSIONS**

### **Socialization > Academics**

It is obvious from this study that the integration model develops the kind of belief system among teachers that students with severe learning difficulties (otherwise mentioned in this paper as students with low educational attainment) may develop socialization skills but there is little or no scope of academic improvement in any case. In fact, teacher C's instructions towards students with severe learning difficulties are predominantly based on socialization rather than any academic based instructions. Also, teacher B points out that the concept of placing students with special needs inside the regular classroom wasn't so successful as it was initially aimed at developing both academic and socialization skills but in reality it fails to deliver any academic improvement for students with severe learning difficulties though we may see some



improvement in socialization skills. Even the success stories of teacher A and C deals with the socialization skills of students with severe learning difficulties. Also, Teacher B's suggestions to new teachers are based on improving the socialization skills of students in order to make them adapt to teachers so that it will be easy for them to plan about any academic intervention. In that case, what if a student with emotional and behavioural difficulties takes a bit longer to adapt to teachers? Or, what if a teacher is holding negative beliefs about emotional and behavioural difficulties itself? Well, obviously in that case this kind of belief system is not promising in providing effective academic instructions as it may get either delayed or avoid when teachers are focused more into developing socialisation skills in the first place. When enquired about the educational plans for students, all the three teachers stressed the point of improving the socialization skills to the most and then work on academic skills according to the ability of the students. Also, teacher B denoted the main problem faced as instructing students with behavioural issues and insisted that the teacher needs training in social and behaviour modification methods. Teacher B does not require any training in improving the academic skills of students as it will be managed by the teacher according to student's IQ level or ability.

### **Ability Based Practices**

In analysing the classroom practices of 3 teachers in the integration model, critically both positive and negative comments can be made out of this study. For example, teacher A's use of differentiated instruction using pictures to convey the core ideas of the lesson to the student with very low educational attainment was evident in one of the observational days. Also, teacher A is more likely to address students with special needs than students without special needs. However, teacher A's suggestion to new and inexperienced teachers are based on ability of the students in such a way that instructing the students according to their ability. Teacher A seemingly instructing, questioning and elaborating the response of students with special needs are evident, but apparently there was no evidence of student follow up and it leads teacher to teach the same content over and over which leads to difficulties in determining the progress of students. However, there is no elaboration of response from teachers B and C to students with low educational attainment and it reflects that the teachers are holding negative beliefs about the ability of students with low educational attainment.

One of the promising attribute of teacher B is that the teacher is against categorising students on the basis of labels which denotes their medical/pathological condition and it was reflected in both observational and interview data of teacher B. In one instance teacher B mentions that special education should be given to all children and it can be argued that teacher B is strongly avoiding the medical model and tries to adapt social model within the integration model itself. On one hand, this reflects the inclusive beliefs of teacher B, and on the other hand teacher B strongly holds to a belief that for students with severe learning difficulties (teacher mentions this as low IQ), educational intervention should be aimed at the student's IQ level. Also, teacher B insists that there should be a separate syllabus for students with severe learning difficulties as they could not access the regular curriculum which is intended for all children. In that case, with the increase in students with severe and complex needs day by day and with various forms of autism emerging in recent days, should we have to develop many different syllabuses for a single classroom? Are these ability based practices acting as barriers to develop interventionist or inclusive belief among teachers? In teacher B's case, though the teacher adapts the social model in integration approach which is promising to be inclusive in some instances, teachers' ability based practices leads to conclude that the teacher is having mixed belief system.

In a study 'learning without limits', Hart (2003) and Hart et.al (2004) examined the way of providing academic interventions that are free from pre-determined assumptions about the abilities of students. The researchers argue that when

constraints are placed on learning through ability based practices, it will lead to students defining themselves in comparison to their peers. It was also argued that if ability is denoted as inborn intelligence which has come to be seen as natural way of talking about students, it would obviously summaries their perceived differences. If teaching is differentiated for more able, average or less able students, *“in this context, what is meant by ability is not made explicit, leaving scope for teachers to interpret what is being recommended in ways that suit their own beliefs and views”* (Ainscow, Dyson and Weiner, 2014, p.19). By approaching teaching which is free from pre-determined assumptions about ability of students, teachers in the research study analysed the gaps between their aspirations for students and what was really happening. Though teacher B is cautious about not categorizing students by labelling them, the ability based practices leads to categorization and influence more ways of segregation in terms of academic instructions. Even the observational data from teacher A and teacher C also confirms that students with low educational attainment were given academic instructions based on the teachers’ belief about students’ ability.

### **The Role of a Learning Support Teacher**

As suggested by Borman & Rose (2010), for students to fully participate in more diversified classrooms, perhaps the learning support provision should shift itself from problem-based approach (ability based practices) towards a promising approach which must determine the levels of support needed for students. The transformation from integration to inclusive model has a direct bearing on the current role of learning support teacher as it impacts significantly on the *“transformation of philosophy, values, and practices of entire educational systems”* (Artiles, Harris-Murri & Rosetenberg, 2006). Lorenz (2002) also suggested that in this transformation, learning support teachers are regarded as key role players, and research suggests that this role is much comprehensive within an inclusive system. As in many countries across the world (Dreyer, 2013), the support teachers in this study also confirms that they have their roots in the individualised medical paradigm. As the nature of learning support changes (Lomofsky & Lazarus, 2001), the main challenge lies in adapting their traditional (medical paradigm) role towards the changing nature (social paradigm) of learning support. The changing nature of learning support which calls a paradigmatic shift from the traditional integration approach towards inclusive approach, involves learning support teacher as an agent for change, agent for collaborative practices and moreover agent for empowering general education teachers. To be the effective agents of transformation, learning support teachers must be enabled to work at a whole school level, and thus the role of learning support teacher has become more complex and comprehensive than was a case of a decade ago (Dreyer, 2013).

Though different strategies were designed and practiced to support learners with special needs in general educational setting across different countries since the 1970s, these efforts actually expanded the special education ways of thinking and practices in general education classrooms (Vislie, 2003). Thus, the critical feature on the role of learning support teacher is they are expected to give specialised and individualised support for students with special needs in general education classroom or in a special class associated within the general education school. The so called traditional practices, in which the learning support teacher act as a remedial teacher where they engage learners with remedial programmes, should now be replaced with more challenging and proactive role so as to support the whole class, by responding to each and every learner in more diverse groups of students. The expectations of general education teachers from learning support teachers in this study vary from teacher to teacher. One of the teachers expects the learning support teacher to sit with the student with low educational attainment for individualised support, whereas other teacher expects the learning support teacher to break down the curriculum based activities in simpler forms/steps to cater for students with

special needs. Thus, it can be argued that the expectations from general education teachers from learning support teachers in this study were based on supporting students rather than supporting teachers. Nevertheless, breaking down the curriculum based activities for students with severe difficulties falls on the concept of curriculum adaptation.

Interestingly, for the teacher (teacher B) who was identified to have mixed beliefs, the expectations were based on supporting the teacher in the area of curricular adaptation methods rather than sitting along with students with special needs for remediation. Thus, more challenges for a learning support teacher who has to work with 3 to 4 general education teachers in dealing with their expectations and belief system too. For a learning support teacher to act as an agent for changing the belief system of teachers, it is essential to provide professional guidance and support to teachers (Florian, 2005) in addition with coordinating provision for learners who are facing barriers to learning (Layton, 2005). If a learning support teacher is supposed to work with 3 or 4 general education teachers in providing curriculum adaptation & differentiated instructional plans for teachers in all subjects in responding to all students, then obviously it demands heavy workload which is arguably a huge challenge for them. In such a case, support teachers with less experience or support teachers who still believe that their role is not beyond any forms of remediation, and still having their roots in medical paradigm, will obviously endanger the transformational phase from integration to inclusion, and creates yet more forms of negative beliefs among school staffs and parents. If the role of learning support teachers has to evolve to inform effective inclusion, so does the need for training to improve their knowledge, skills and attributes, and confidence (Cowne, 2005).

An Australian study reflecting the attributes of successful learning support teachers in inclusive classrooms (Fielding-Barnsley, 2005) explored that according to general education teachers the attributes of successful learning support teachers are communication, organisational skills and personality traits. The study also suggested that according to learning support teachers, the attributes of successful support teachers are knowledge and experience. For effective collaboration with general education teachers, perhaps the most influencing attributes of learning support teachers are communication and organisational skills than specific knowledge or experience. Do learning support teachers get training on such soft skills required for collaboration from their degree or diploma? While learning support teachers have to become 'consultative and collaborative' (Fielding-Barnsley, 2005), the SENCO (Special Educational Needs CO-ordinator as in the UK) acts as 'catalysts and facilitators' to support general education teachers in responding to greater diversity (Mittler, 2000). The most challenging aspect of the role of learning support teachers in the rural areas of developing countries is that they have to act in both roles i.e., they have to be 'consultative and collaborative' and they have to act as 'catalysts and facilitators' in informing effective inclusion. With such a demand placed on the role of learning support teachers, and as it is closely related to reconstruction of the education system, it is imperative that the roles and responsibilities should be fully understood and supported well by every other staff in the school system including principals, senior staff and other school governing bodies (Mittler, 2000).

## CONCLUSIONS

Internationally, comparing the roles of learning support teachers, Emmanuelsson (2001) suggests that the similarities between their roles are striking than the differences on them. On a personal view of a SENCO, Grant (2011) whose role is coordinating special education needs in the UK mentioned that, the role is like running in a maze with a lot of to-do list while supporting staffs and many squeezed meetings in-between lessons makes the role extremely overwhelming. Grant also suggested that as there are no magical cures for special needs, everything has to be done patiently with trial and error process. Moreover, the role challenges to be a school leader and also a teacher with curiosity and creativity.

Considering the overwhelming experience of a SENCO (as in the UK), it can be argued that the role of learning support teachers has no scope in adapting the inclusive model with little or no leadership. Indeed it is irony that learning support teachers, almost certainly not well paid and least well trained in general education curriculum, should be given a key role in promoting inclusion in *enabling* general curriculum accessibility for students who, because of the nature of their learning difficulties, may be hardest to teach. Unless learning support teachers are trained and acknowledged as a part of senior leadership member within the general school to work strategically with teachers in promoting systemic changes towards inclusion from integration, these challenges on the role of support teachers remains unaddressed, and it may create yet more forms of segregations threatening the very basic idea of ‘education for all’.

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