

EFFECTIVE IMPLEMENTING OF INCLUSIVE EDUCATION FOR CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES IN VIETNAM

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Abstract. Over the last decade, inclusion has become a world trend in special education. In response to that trend, the Vietnamese government has adopted a progressive policy to implement inclusive education. However, it is found there are barriers of implementing inclusive education in Vietnam emerged from school teachers educational facilities, mobility and physical environment and social attitude. Based on that, this paper attempts to give some suggestions for having strategies to promote implementation of inclusive education in Vietnam. Especially, we recommend for the role of the social worker's intervention as facilitator for learners with disabilities in inclusive education.

Keywords: Inclusive education, social work, students, school, children, disabilities.

1. Introduction

Children with disabilities are excluded from every aspect of life because the general public believes them to be incapable of doing anything. For example, they do not have adequate healthcare; they do not have friends; they do not have educational opportunities. In order to stop the vicious cycle of marginalization, the society must intervene as early as possible through an effective inclusive education system. Recently, inclusion has become the main goal in developing nations in Asia to include 90% of children with disabilities who are not having access to any education. In Vietnam, not even 8% of children with visual impairment receive any type of education [1].

The inclusive education philosophy recognizes and appreciates that all humans have a right to social services regardless of their orientation. It accepts individuals as unique, recognizing that all have a right to develop their abilities/capabilities [2]. It focuses on the need to foster people's participation and eliminating all forms of discrimination in society. The philosophy of inclusion is thus important in ensuring that people develop social skills needed for their daily living [3].

The Vietnamese government indicates that inclusive education should be provided to maximize the educational opportunities for disabled children. Inclusive education allows children with and without disabilities to be educated in the same setting where adjustments

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are made to fully accommodate the needs of the students with disabilities. In fact, there are barriers to entry into public schools for children with disabilities. Due to being denied access to public schools, many families seek alternative education for their children through special schools or private home tutors [4]. These alternatives are associated with higher fees that are not affordable by all households. Therefore, it is necessary to develop of proper systems to implement the concept of inclusive education and the mechanism of monitoring to ensure its effective implementation.

This paper aims to examine the barriers and difficulties of implementing inclusive education and some recommendations for having further strategies to promote implementation and monitoring of inclusive education in Vietnam, following strategies are suggested for consideration.

2. Content

2.1. Background of inclusive education in Vietnam

According to Mani (2000), *“Inclusive Education means creating effective classrooms where the educational needs of all children are addressed irrespective of ability or disability”* [5].

As per the Salamanca statement, adopted at the 1994 World Conference on Special Needs Education, *“Inclusive Education is the most effective means of combating discriminatory attitudes, creating welcoming communities, building an inclusive society and achieving true education for all”*. *“Inclusive Education is concerned with overcoming barriers to participation that may be experienced by any pupil ... It is a never-ending process... dependent on continuous pedagogical and organizational development within the mainstream”* [6].

In Vietnam, pursuant to the Law on PWDs there are three approaches of education for PWDs including inclusive education, special education and semi-inclusive (integrated) education. These three approaches are defined as follows:

- i) Inclusive education is an educational approach that accommodates both persons with disabilities and persons without disabilities in educational establishments.
- ii). Special education is an educational approach that is exclusively for persons with disabilities in educational establishments.
- iii) Semi-inclusive education is an educational approach that combines inclusive and special education for persons with disabilities in educational establishments [7].

It is stipulated by the Law in Article 28 that PWDs are encouraged to participate in the inclusive education, which is considered to be the main approach of education for PWDs. Semi-inclusive and special education are applied only in the case there are not enough conditions for PWDs to pursue inclusive education [7].

In 2006 the Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) issued Decision No.23/2006/QĐ-BGDĐT on Inclusive Education for Disabled and Handicapped Persons. Recently on January 29th, 2018, MOET promulgated Circular No.03/2018/TT- BGDĐT on Inclusive Education for Persons with Disabilities. Accordingly, the purpose of inclusive education is that PWDs are able to develop their own capacity, integrate and

have more opportunities to contribute to the community; ensure the rights to equal, quality and appropriate education with the characteristics and ability of PWDs [8].

There are several differences between the two documents in terms of the rights of PWDs, although the number of items is the same, the details of some contents have been revised in the updated one. More specifically both documents stipulate that PWDs can enroll at higher ages compared to the ordinary regulated enrollment ages. However, while Article 19 of the 2006 Decision details that PWDs can be exempted from some courses if their physical disabilities do not allow them to take, or they can enjoy prioritized policy for admission when applying in higher education institutions and other favorable conditions during the course of their study. The 2008 Circular has briefed these contents in item 7, mentioning Joint Circular No.42/2013/TTLT-BGDĐT-BLĐT BXH-BTC promulgated by the MOET together with the Ministry of Labor, Invalid and Social Affairs (MOLISA) and the Ministry of Finance (MOF), which concretely regulates the educational policy for PDWs. This Joint Circular will be discussed later in the paper. One new content is added in Article 15 of Circular 03/2018 compared to Decision 23/2006 is the rights of PWDs to information security of their disabled situation.

It is recorded that Viet Nam has about 1.2 million children with disabilities (CWDs), of which 27% have intellectual disabilities, 20% have mobility disabilities, 19% have speaking disabilities, 12,43% have hearing impairment, 12% have visual impairment and 7% have other types of disabilities. Children with severe and especially severe disabilities account for about 31% of the total CWDs, while multi- handicapped children make up 12.62%. Causes of the disabilities include innate causes (72.38%), illness (24,34%), accidents (3,93%), and birth difficulties (2,28%) [9].

In the academic year of 2017-2018 Vietnam has 8,041,842 students in primary education⁸. Another report from the Ministry of Education and Training shows that there are 52,711 of the CWDs participated in inclusive education, and 16,000 participated in special education [9]. So far the MOET has implemented policies to support both students with disabilities and teachers have access to and participate in education for PWDs. These policies include promoting the training and retraining of management and skilled teachers for education of CWDs, improve learning facilities, and equipping schools with specialized teaching aids to enhance the quality of education for CWDs [9]. As a result, it is reported that learning outcomes of SWDs have been significantly improved. The percentage of students classified as having above average learning capacity has increased to 48,5%, and the number of SWDs repeating grades or dropping out has remarkably decreased [9]. However, there is a fact that although CWDs are encouraged to have inclusive education with non-disabled students at regular schools, few regular schools can appropriately accommodate CWDs. On the other hand, parents of children without disabilities are reluctant to send their kids to special schools to study inclusively with CWDs, particularly with those children who have learning disabilities [10]

2.2. Barriers of inclusive education in Vietnam

2.2.1. Teachers

In Vietnam teacher is acknowledged as the important factor for social inclusion in school, especially the image of teacher is really essential from children's perspective. The impacts from teachers play an important role for children's outcomes in academic and

non-academic areas significantly. However, almost teachers in inclusive institutions are lack of knowledge and skills on teaching and working with CWD as well as CWND in order to promote inclusion. This situation is due to the limitation on pedagogic system in which almost programs exclude training teaching students with knowledge and skills on teaching in inclusive settings. On looking at almost curriculums at training teachers for primary, secondary and high schools from programs several institutions which train teachers, it is found that except the Undergraduate Program on Special education, there is not any specific subjects on inclusive education or teaching the children in special need. So, almost teachers are lack of professional knowledge and skill on working with children in special needs in general and CWD in particular [11].

2.2.2. Educational facilities

It is found that there are less educational facilities, as shortage of textbooks and other supplementary for CWD on inclusive education. For those in visionary difficulty, the shortage of textbooks and learning supports for studying is an important factor for their learning. In this area, knowledge and skills on teaching in inclusive education is very important, in additions materials for teaching CWD in specific type of disabilities (hearing and vision disabilities) also contributes great impacts to the learning process. For those CWD in term of physical one, it is rarely to get their voice on talking about the difficulties on learning materials and facilities [11].

2.2.3. Mobility and physical environment

The accessible way or pathway for people with disability (PWD) is neglected in almost streets; public places and transportation, in spite of the requirements of having ways and facilities for PWD in new buildings have been approved in legislation and fundamental social policies. Almost schools in Hanoi, were built previously or recently, are less accessible for PWD, especially those are special schools. That is one of limitations for PWD to access and involve in activities with peer students in schools. Almost voices of CWD expose the difficulties on moving and walking in the inaccessible physical conditions. These conditions are about the way for wheelchair, the stair steps, limited playground, and places for outdoor activities. This situation is consistent in almost schools in Hanoi as well as in Vietnam. CWDs have assistance from other children, but normally on specific activities for studying, is preferable and popular, it is hard to get any clues about the assistances in areas of mobility as well for further social inclusion [11].

2.2.4. Social attitudes

In schools, some CWD also experienced the stigma from other kids as well as from teachers on looking at their social position, abilities in learning and playing as well as prospects of CWD. From CWD's experiences, they find more difficulties in term of social attitudes in inclusive environment rather. That experience is also existed in interaction with teachers. There are some forms of bad social attitudes such as not paying attention, annoying, not sympathetic, negative labelling, insulting, discrimination. The social attitude is being progressive after CWD had a chance to play, learn and go with CWND. Many ideas expressed that it is recommended to start inclusive education from early year, as from preschool activities as well as having more chance for children to play together inside and outside school settings. At school in spite of CWND express their willing and feelings on supporting CWD that is required from teachers, CWND as well as CWD aim

at playing together in their groups rather than in mixed groups. Negative attitudes seem to be stated more clearly in those schools CWD participated in later class (i.e. not attending from their first years) as well as in those schools with lacking in inclusive teachers and inclusive materials and facilities [11].

2.3. Recommendations for effectively implementing inclusive education

2.3.1. Supporting and facilitating factors

There are following implications to satisfy with the conditions in Vietnam suitably that supporting the implementation inclusive education.

- i) Training experts and teachers of Pedagogical Colleges and Universities are required;
- ii) Awareness creation on the concept and implementation of inclusive education is of paramount importance;
- iii) Training key teachers to support inclusive education and Early Intervention, imparting knowledge and skills to teachers of visually impaired children and sensitising family members on the need of inclusive education for their children are essential components to initiate the programme;
- iv) Compiling a monograph on inclusion for policy makers, textbook for students and guidebook on management of visually impaired children for teachers are needed.

As a result, to meet other challenges such as: Braille textbook, large print textbook of low vision students, teaching materials, equipment and devices, Vietnam needs the following facilitating factors.

- i) Uniform Braille code system;
- ii) Infrastructural and high-tech facilitating to prepare textbooks that can be disseminated throughout the country;
- iii) Systems to procure and distribute assistive devices to visually impaired children;
- iv) Organizing national seminars to teachers to share expertise on the method of teaching visually impaired [1].

2.3.2. The role of school social worker

In order to develop a better understanding of the role of social worker, rendering services to learners with disabilities in inclusive setting, the primary concern of the social worker is to identify unmet needs of people by using their extensive knowledge about human development, human diversity, social systems, eco-systems and strengths. The primary concern caters to the improvement of social functioning of people in interaction with their environment [12].

Based on the above discussion, the impactful role of the social worker as a facilitator in inclusive education are:

- i) To protect and care for vulnerable individuals and groups in society by improving human well-being and alleviating operation and other forms of social injustice in reference to persons and children with special needs.
- ii) Empower and advocate rights and policies which have been dispensed as the human rights of persons with disabilities, promote social and economic justice leading to upliftment of the disabled, combat social isolation.

iii) To create sensitization and awareness, removing barriers to participate in the society, making sure that the children with special needs have the same chance to be a part of the society and contribute to it at their own particular level of ability.

iv) Provide equal access to children with special needs/persons with disabilities equal access to physical environment, learning environment, appropriate health and social care provision, and training and employment opportunities.

v) Assist with contacting families of children with special educational needs in the area of the school; Participate in the identification of special needs of the pupils in school; Orientate and provide information to parents and pupils when they enter school;

vi) Provide information on rights and opportunities for social and legal protection for pupils with special educational needs; Identify traces from violence on pupils and inform the authorities for child protection.

vii) Carry out individual and group meetings with all students at the school on various issues; Consult school management to adapt the school environment in a welcoming environment for pupils with disabilities.

viii) Organize information campaigns and training of students, parents and teachers; Contact with different institutions for social and educational services in the community; Provide school mediation in conflict relationships.

The school social work services provided depend on your child's unique needs depending on individual needs. The roles of school social workers vary from one school district to another. School social workers may work with children in general education, special education, or both. School social workers may talk with children and their parents when a child is being considered for special education services. It depends on the type of disability. Social workers are often part of the team of people involved in the evaluation when a child has behavior challenges or mental health concerns. School social workers may provide counseling to individual children, work with children in groups, or work with entire classrooms. School social workers may help families get services that they need or connect families to other community agencies. School social workers may consult with teachers, parents, and other adults in the children's lives. School social workers may address needs at the individual level, group level, and school level.

3. Conclusion

Improving the effectiveness of inclusive education progress is not the responsibility of the educationists, but also among administrators, policy makers/implementers, human rights advocates (particularly those who advocate for the rights of people with disabilities) and social workers (who advocate for social justice and empowerment of vulnerable members of society). Although there are complexity and barriers in implementing inclusive education, many countries have seen the importance of educating children together, regardless of their abilities. Further, it is important for Social Workers to have an in-depth knowledge and understanding of disability because theories of disability do influence their practice and future research in the sense that social workers ought to effective positive functioning among the marginalized people in society through evidence-based knowledge (Cunningham & Fleming, 2009).

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