

Inclusive Education in Nepal and Role of School Psychologist

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Inclusive education is a strategy that identifies children who, for any reason, are excluded from a specific context of schooling and promotes a process of social and academic inclusion of all children within the school. Traditionally, learning outcomes for students involve academic, social, and emotional outcomes and are closely tied to a school's culture and ethos. Many school psychologists, as well as child therapists and professionals, have been seriously concerned with the effectiveness of their individual-centred practice, and they are concerned with the development of more child-focused and system-centered approaches as they recognise that incorporating children's and stakeholder perspectives into the counselling or therapeutic process appears to improve its effectiveness. The major objective of this review is to understand the current context of inclusive education in Nepal and also compare it with international progress in inclusive education. In addition, the role of school psychologists in improving the inclusive education environment is also studied. Although an inclusive educational environment benefits students greatly, it is not widely recognised due to a lack of awareness and strategic education implementation policies that promote inclusive education. School psychologists play the most vital role in the successful implementation of inclusive education, as they understand the school environment's pros and cons and students' psychological states in every inclusive environment. And for this reason, the presence of school psychologists is essential in any inclusive educational environment.

Keywords: Inclusive Education, Nepal, School Psychologist, Essential.

Introduction

Inclusive education can be defined as a systematic way of education that encompasses the students from every group in a community, ranging from the deprived and marginalised to those with physical, emotional, or psychological issues, and provides similar educational opportunities to every one of them. According to Barton (1997), "Inclusive education is about responding to diversity; it is about listening to unfamiliar voices, being

open, empowering all members, and about celebrating "difference" in dignified ways." From this perspective, the goal is not to leave anyone out of school. "Learning to live with one another is what inclusive experience is all about." The concept of inclusive education was developed at the World Conference on Special Needs Education held in Salamanca, Spain, in 1994. Representatives from 92 governments and 25 international organisations participated, and that was one of the most important steps taken for the inclusivity of children in education. The major conclusions of the conference focused on child rights, the uniqueness of children in characteristics, interests, abilities, and learning needs, access to regular schooling, and an effective inclusive environment that meets the needs of every student. The concept of education for children with special needs has always been around in nations

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like the UK and the USA. Since the early to mid-nineteenth century, there have been discussions and debates about special education, as well as the integration of special education and its recipients into regular educational settings (Lindsay, 2003, p. 01). However, since the Salamanca conference, the practise of inclusive education has spread and enjoyed quiet success, as we will see below.

There are two specific ways to look at education for everyone: one is through specialised education environments for students with needs for special education, and another is the inclusion of all students in the same educational environment, equipped with policies and every other requirement that is needed for inclusivity and similar opportunity for all. And there is enough advocacy for both schools of thought and, hence, inclusive education; in general, education for all is riddled with uncertainties, disputes, and contradictions (Ainscow, 2005, p. 02). Ainscow (2005) states that, through collaborative action research in multiple nations, although there are multiple factors linked to inclusive education, two of them are very potent. They are: clarity of definition in relation to the idea of inclusion and the forms of evidence that are used to measure educational performance. Although there are multiple factors that affect the definition and, in turn, the policies of inclusive education, Ainscow states that there are four key elements that have featured strongly. They are:

- Inclusion is a process, meaning it's a never-ending process with continuous progress towards betterment.
- Inclusion is concerned with the identification and removal of barriers, meaning utilising as many varieties of resources to identify and remove the barriers to improve education.
- Inclusion is about the presence, participation, and achievement of all students, which means the interest of students in participating in school activities and the outcome of the experience in the overall quality of the student's life.
- Inclusion involves a particular emphasis on those groups of learners who may be at risk of marginalization, exclusion, or underachievement. As the statement says, specific care and attention are given to those students who are more at risk.

Inclusive education also differs by country. According to Sharma (2015), in developed countries, the entirety of the population has been integrated well into the education system, including girls and

disadvantaged and ethnic groups, and the children with disabilities and learning difficulties who were previously educated in separate special schools are now being recommended to regular schools with an inclusive environment. Therefore, reform in special education holds the majority of attention in inclusive education in developed nations. But on the contrary, a large population of children with disabilities don't attend school, and those who do attend are segregated and sent to separate schools and aren't getting a superior quality of education. In the meantime, they aren't taught about negative social perceptions and ways to tackle them, which hinder children's lives. Hence, in developing nations, the major focus has to be on equitable access to education (Sharma, 2015).

Inclusive education worldwide

The first government white paper on "Integrating the Disabled into the Community: A United Effort" was published in 1977 and called for integrating children with disabilities in mainstream schools. (Hong Kong Government, 1977, Section 4.2c). And 20 years after that, the first pilot regarding the integrated school was initiated, and it included seven primary schools and two secondary schools, and they admitted five to eight students with mild special education needs (SEN). According to Forlin, C. (2010), the involvement of mainstream schools in inclusive education has progressed slowly since 1997, with a more dramatic rise in inclusive schools after 2005. The pilot began with seven primary and two secondary schools, but by 2008/2009, there were 344 schools with SEN students. And this doesn't necessarily mean it's been a smooth ride. The inclusive approach hasn't been well received by teachers, as it is not seen as a very ideal way to practise education for all, with special concern over it being unrealistic for regular teachers to cater to the needs of students with SEN (Forlin, C. 2010).

Italy has been at the forefront in the practise and implementation of inclusive education as it has been in practise in Italy since the 1970s, and because of this, they have been involved in the development and renewal of inclusive education policies (Marsili, Morganti, & Signorelli, 2021). Following the conclusion of a parliamentary committee that "every situation of human, cultural, and social exclusion can cause failure in developing potential in each individual, and compulsory education along with school structure can

contribute in overcoming it,” Italy abolished the special education system in favour of an integrated school system. In this phase of implementation of inclusive education policies, they used the concept of “assimilation” at first and then the concept of “integration,” and this helped with the development of policies and also implementation (Marsili, Morganti, & Signorelli, 2021). According to Marsili et al., one of the major innovations that helped educators work according to the needs of students in various shapes and forms during its inception was the use of flexibility in curriculum. Data collected by the Ministry of Education in 2017/18 show that out of the overall population of students with disabilities, 23.8% attend high school, 27.3% attend polytechnic schools, and the rest, 48.9% attend professional school. Although this might not be remarkable for a nation with a rich history of inclusive education practice, for a nation like Nepal, this can be an inspiration toward the execution of inclusive education practices.

The concept and practises of inclusive education can be traced back to as early as the 18th and 19th centuries in Vadarasi. We can see this trend throughout the 19th century, too. There are multiple examples of special schools opening throughout India for students with special education needs. After India’s independence in 1954, the practise of inclusive education started in mainstream schools, which had a

prominent effect on the inclusive education initiative in India. And in 1974, integrated education policies were initiated. Several other initiatives were also taken for the advancement of inclusive education and to promote the practise of inclusive education to better facilitate students with special education needs. Some institutes, such as the National Institute for the Developmentally and Intellectually Handicapped, the National Institute for the Mentally Handicapped, the National Institute of Rehabilitation, Training, and Research, were established for the same purpose. Some of the most recent initiatives taken by the government are Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE), Integrated Education for the Disabled Children (IEDC), Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) (Movement to Educate All), etc. (Ramalingam, 2021).

Inclusive Education in Nepal: A historical milestones

Inclusive education with the integration of children without any form of inequity has been in practise in various parts of the world for a long time, and in a similar vein, it has been talked about since the mid-19th century. The Nepal National Educational Planning Commission, 1956 (NNEPC), first identified the inequalities based on gender, class, and language, but no special provision was suggested. In 1966, ten years after the identification, the All Round National Education Committee (ARNEC) published a report with a suggestion to establish social education centres in each development centre to train individuals to care for disabled students responsibly. The National Educational System Plan (NESP, 1971–76) created a special education needs council to work with and run special education programs. Although the ultimate plan was to expand throughout the nation, its initiation was done in densely populated areas like Kathmandu. The newly formed National Education Commission (NEC) in 1992 recommended the government prioritise providing education to women and disabled individuals.

In the context of Nepal, inclusive educational practises have been on a slow burn. As an effort towards reaching a common understanding of inclusive education.

The Department of Education (DOE) of the Ministry of Education defines inclusive education as a process of developing an educational system that ensures the opportunity for nondiscriminatory education

in their own community while respecting multiculturalism differences. Inclusive education believes in the principle that all children can learn if they are given an appropriate environment and support to address their needs, and recognises the importance of the community's ownership in schools (DoE, 2011). As per Regmi (2019), DoE has identified these groups as those who would benefit from inclusive education: girl children and women, children with disabilities, dalit children, minority ethnic groups, street children, children affected by conflict, children affected by trafficking and sexual abuse, children severely affected by poverty, children of bonded laborers, children in jail, children infected and affected by HIV/AIDS, and child labourers (DoE, 2011).

Inclusive education Practices in Nepal

According to a study published by the Research Center for Educational Innovation and Development Nepal (CERID), inclusive education is a new concept in Nepal and was introduced in 2000 as a pilot project in Nepal under the Education for All (EFA) initiative. After the pilot project in 4 districts, it was expanded to 60 more schools in 8 districts. As this was conducted and studied meticulously, many findings were observed, which further helped to increase the effectiveness of the project. Some of the major findings were that the children in need didn't have easy and equitable access to the project; the schools didn't have the facilities required to conduct the inclusive education programs; and the teachers weren't trained well enough to conduct the class in an inclusive environment. After studying the findings, some further steps were taken, such as organising teacher training programmes to help teachers better handle the inclusive environment of the classroom and run the class effectively for everyone.

Another more recent programme titled "Equity and Inclusion in Education" was done through UNICEF and World Education Inc. in the district of Rautahat. The programme will be based on UNICEF's Education Strategy goal: "By 2022, all children, especially the most disadvantaged, will benefit from improved access, participation, and learning outcomes in pre-primary and basic education within inclusive, safe, and protective environments." The programme was designed to include children with disabilities as well as children from underserved communities in the district. The major

goal of the programme was to provide quality education during the early grades, especially to the most disadvantaged children, which includes children with disabilities, those who don't speak Nepali as their mother tongue, children from marginalised communities, etc. During the two-year course of the program, it focused on integrating inclusive strategies for teaching and providing additional skills to the teachers, like using mother tongue for instruction in the classroom and developing models for small schools to improve early grade reading (EGR) and early grade math (EGM) to further enhance the learning process.

The Daleki School, run by Vicki Educational and Development Foundation Nepal (VEDFON), an NGO operating in Nepal since 1993, works to assist underprivileged children from marginalised communities get education. It was established in order to provide formal education to children from marginalised communities. The school is an established secondary school and has plans to become a higher secondary school. The school integrates children with special education needs into mainstream classes. The teachers are given special training to understand the needs of every child, and there are also professional special education coordinators to assist in making plans to better integrate every student and meet their needs. And special education teachers and qualified psychotherapists are ever-present to assist every child to adapt and rehabilitate in mainstream school settings. The entire faculty and every staff member make collaborative efforts to make sure the diverse needs of the students are met. The vision of the school is a future without any form of inequality or discrimination in terms of socio-economic status or physical or mental disability. They promote the inclusion of every disadvantaged community in education.

School Mental health issues in Nepal

According to a paper by Chaulagain, Kunwar, Watts, et al. (2019), there is a prevalence of post-traumatic stress syndrome (PTSS) among 10.7%–51% of earthquake-affected children and adolescents in the Kathmandu district of Nepal. In another study, 53.2% of former child soldiers were found to have met the cutoff score for PTSS. According to a survey conducted in two schools, 12.9–17.03 percent of school children have emotional and behavioural problems, and homeless children have a 28.6 percent

prevalence. Anxiety disorder and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) are also prevalent in various clinical samples of children and adolescents, with anxiety disorder reported among 18.8%–24.4% and ADHD reported among 10–11.7%.

In government schools, there are children with various learning disorders, which are less common in private schools but can still be seen. 30% had severe dyslexia and 17% had mild dyslexia, 20% had severe dysgraphia and 11% had mild dysgraphia, 30% had severe dyscalculia and 6% had mild dyscalculia in government schools, while 4% had severe dyslexia and 14% had mild dyslexia, 6% had severe dysgraphia and 2% had mild dysgraphia, and 10% had severe dyscalculia and 6% had mild dyscalculia in private schools. Based on these findings, it is suggested that government schools should focus on identifying and minimising the effect of learning disorders in school settings (Thagunna & Dhungel, 2019). Another study shows that among the age groups of 16–24 years, anxiety, depression, and stress were predominant. Another study done in Bhaktapur with 325 participants between the age groups of 13 and 17 showed that suicidal ideation is also prevalent among Nepalese adolescents. It showed that 2.5% had very low suicidal ideation, 32.2% had low suicidal ideation, and 64.3% had average suicidal ideation. The factors associated with suicidal ideation are age, education grade (class), and religion. (Dangi, Thagunna, Khayamali, and Subba, 2022). In addition to this, there is also a prominent issue of internet addiction among youths in Nepal. Another study was conducted with 136 students, 71 of whom were male and 65 female, 108 of whom lived in nuclear families, and 75 of whom were between the ages of 19 and 22. It showed 11% (15) had normal or no internet addiction, 92 (67.6%) had mild internet addiction, and 29 (21.3%) had moderate internet addiction (Khayamali, Khayamali, Thagunna, & Bhat, 2022). According to a report published by Karmacharya, Bhujel, Yadav, and Subedi (2018) on internet addiction, out of 440 respondents among adolescents in Kathmandu, 31.78 percent were heavy users, and 2.57 percent were severely addicted.

Roles of School Psychologist in promoting Inclusive education

The concept of school psychology is a novel one in Nepal, where psychology itself isn't well developed.

The counsellors themselves work as school psychologists. Although counsellors don't precisely possess the knowledge and training related to the practise in school settings, they do provide some support in those settings. As put forth by Panch Ramalingam, School psychologists are professionals who work objectively in the school system and apply scientific principles of learning and behaviour related to school education. They would be more effective and would be more beneficial to the children and also for the school environment.

School psychologists, according to the California Association of School Psychologists, are professionals who have been trained and have adequate knowledge in both education and psychology. As a result, they tend to make a positive contribution to any educational setting, making the teaching and learning process more effective and convenient for both educators and students. They can also help management become more efficient and make decisions that result in more positive outcomes in the school setting. As per the California Association of School Psychologists, there are quite a few things that a school psychologist can do to create a more wholesome school environment. For example, they can advise teachers and administrators on how to effectively set and meet learning objectives for each individual child, as well as assist parents in understanding their children's learning and adjustment processes. In addition, they can coordinate the crisis intervention in cases of individual and classroom crises, as they have the knowledge to do so, and they can also work on early intervention and prevention of any crisis situation. They can assess the abilities of individual children and act accordingly to improve student performances and outcomes. They are well equipped to assist and coordinate the evaluation of the effectiveness of various programmes that are currently in implementation, enhance the effectiveness and efficiency of those programmes, or start a completely new programme that is more effective for the current scenario.

Thinking in educational psychological support has traditionally focused on the so-called medical deficit approach, within which educational difficulties are explained solely in terms of learner deficits (Ainscow, 1999; Donald, 1996; Kavale & Forness, 2000; Williams, 2000). As can be deduced from the aforementioned possible roles, the traditional view of the role of a school psychologist or educational psychologist is not well

suited to the current situation. And this is even more evident in the inclusive education setting, as it hasn't yet been widely adopted in Nepal. As there hasn't been widespread acceptance and implementation of an inclusive education environment, the role of a school psychologist looks more evident and imminent for the betterment of students themselves. The specialised insight, skills, and practise of an educational psychologist are of major importance in providing appropriate support within the educational environment that supports an inclusive setting and aims to assist students with SEN. This creates a specific environment in an educational setting that supports inclusive education strategies while also working together to increase the effectiveness of those strategies. This is essential in taking holistic health promotion, developmental, and preventive steps related to the advancement of individuals, schools, and communities toward an effective inclusive environment in educational settings (Engelbrecht, 2004).

Discussion

Inclusive education by definition holds a high value in the current education scenario, mostly in developing nations with high prospects and also, to some extent, in developed nations with enough facilities and well-developed education planning dating back decades. As the term implies, inclusive education is all about making educational resources available to everyone, regardless of differences. Although inclusive and special education have been in practise in nations like the USA, UK, and Italy since the mid-1900s, they gained momentum after the concept of inclusive education was developed at the World Conference on Special Needs Education held in Salamanca, Spain, in 1994. After that, it spread throughout the globe with the help of global organisations like UNICEF. And the implementation was easier and more fruitful in developed nations than in developing nations; also, their underlying requirements and initial policies were different, even though the final goals were the same.

In the context of Nepal, through the initiative taken by the, and ministry of education, inclusive education was formally started in the year as a00 as pilot project in 4 districts later, after it was expanded to 8 more district. Although the findings demonstrated efficacy, it was also concluded that more efforts with effective planning are required. And basethat, that many

programs were conducted better infrastructure was provided to run inclusive classes effectively. Many efforts are being made without the government's direct involvement. Such a 2-year equity and inclusion programme was conducted in Rauthahat by UNICEF and World Education Inc. with a major focus on basic education for children from marginalised communities. Similarly, The Daleki School, run by Vicki Educational and Development Foundation Nepal (VEDFON), an NGO operating in Nepal since 1993, works to assist underprivileged children from marginalised communities get education.

Every human being has needs, and to get those needs met, education has become a vital tool. As per various studies done in Nepal, there is a wide prevalence of psychological issues among children and adolescents, ranging from autism spectrum disorder to internet addiction. And they have special education needs. And they have been denied access to quality education for a long time, and it can be difficult to understand their needs; sometimes assistance is required, and a psychologist can be that assistant. A school psychologist has the required knowledge to make the process of inclusion smoother and more prolific, as they are individuals who possess knowledge about both education and psychology. The specialised insight, skills, and practise of educational psychology hold major importance in providing appropriate support within the educational environment that supports an inclusive setting. A school psychologist can act on multiple fronts while working in inclusive settings. They can assist the students within the inclusive environment, which includes assessment along with direct and indirect intervention around risk and difficulties among students. They can work with parents regarding the importance of this period, despite physical or psychological difficulties among each student, and work together with them to enhance their chances of better integration. They can actively participate in admirable work in a school setting by designing, developing, and implementing training programs. They can also work with staff members of the school facility in order to improve the overall situation of the educational setting.

Conclusion

This article focuses on the school psychologist's role in an inclusive environment. And inclusive education has been practised for a long time, and the

involvement of a school psychologist has been a significant step in enhancing the process of integration and inclusion of everyone. Because of the wide range of knowledge that they possess, school psychologists can work on multiple fronts in an inclusive environment, thereby improving the process of inclusion. They can be of great assistance for the identification of limitations in every aspect of an inclusive environment and also for strengthening those fields by working on those limitations. Hence, inclusive education holds a high degree of importance in this age, and for a better inclusive environment, school psychologists play a vital role by being involved in every aspect of the inclusive education environment.

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