

# CONFLUX

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# REFLECTIONS ON FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS REGARDING IMPLEMENTATION OF INCLUSIVE EDUCATION IN THE STATE OF PUNJAB

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## Abstract

*In this article, the purpose of holding focus group discussions was to investigate the perceptions of stakeholders regarding implementation of inclusive education in the state of Punjab and also by referring also to feedback received from the participants when they shared their experiences. The discussions were held with the stakeholders involving: District level administrators group/DEO's/Coordinators, SSA staff, Inclusive Education Resource Teachers (IERT's), Physiotherapists, Parents' group and Teachers' group. The focus groups were held in six districts of Punjab. Focus group interviews were conducted to gather collective ideas of their experiences and their suggestions regarding challenges faced in implementation of education.*

## INTRODUCTION

As a lack of understanding about what 'inclusive education' means, can be a barrier to inclusion (Baglieri, Bejoian, Broderick, Connor & Valle, 2011), the first step in preparing teachers to meet the demands of the inclusive classroom is to define the term, 'inclusive education'. This term is used extensively throughout educational literature, often in differing ways. The UNESCO Policy Guidelines on Inclusion in Education (2009) state that an inclusive education system can only be created if ordinary schools become more open and accepting; in other words, if schools become better at educating all the children who live in their communities.

According to Loreman et. al. (2016), Inclusion, involves the full participation of all students in all aspects of schooling regardless of individual differences. It involves regular schools and class-rooms being responsive, willing to adapt to the diverse needs and abilities of all students and valuing differences.

- Inclusion is a scientific process to bring change and improvement to make education more welcoming, learner friendly, and beneficial for a wide and diverse range of learners.
- Inclusion aims at removing barrier of learners' access to education, participation in learning process, and academic and social achievement.
- It is a process in which all stakeholders participate, i.e. teachers, parents, community members and local leaders, Government Policy Makers, NGOs etc.

Inclusive education can happen in all learning spaces that are non-formal rather than happening in formal schools.

Peggy Hammeken (2009) suggests about the *Inclusive Environment*, where students with or without disability play together, work on projects collaboratively, and support one another. In this

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way, all students are integral part of classroom community, students who feel part of the group, therefore are more likely to learn.

A focus group is a type of group interview in which a moderator leads discussion with a small group of individuals to examine in detail how the group members feel and think about a topic (Johnson & Christensen, 2008). A focus group usually involves 8 to 12 individuals who discuss a particular topic under the direction of a moderator, who promotes interaction and ensures that the discussion remains on the topic of interest and creates a non-threatening and non-evaluative environment (Stewart & Shamdasani, 1990). Focus groups are planned sessions where individual discuss ideas and perceptions focused around a topic of interest (Krueger, 1993)

Focus group methodology is a way of collecting data, typically engaging a small number of people in an informal group discussion, focused around a particular topic or set of issues. Typically the discussion is recorded, transcribed and then analysed using conventional techniques for qualitative data: mostly commonly, content or thematic analysis. Focus groups are distinctive then, primarily for the method of data collection rather than for the method of data analysis. (Silverman, 2011)

Focus groups are less threatening to many research participants, and this environment is helpful for participants to discuss perceptions, ideas, opinions, and thoughts (Krueger & Casey, 2000). Researchers have used focus groups for decades (Morgan, 1998), indeed for the past 80 years. In the 1920s, they were conducted to assist researchers in identifying survey questions (Morgan, 1998).

In this article, the views of the participants of focus groups conducted in the study entitled *Evaluation of Inclusive Education in the state of Punjab* were explored.

The aims of this article are to:

- Explain how the focus group sessions were conducted in Punjab
- To gather views of focus groups regarding implementation of Inclusive Education
- Lacuna in the implementation of Inclusive education
- Suggestions and Recommendations of focus groups

Briefly put, philosophy underpinning the focus group discussions was that one of the purposes of focus group discussions is to encourage participants (including the facilitators) to engage in processes of collective sense-making. This is similar to Wilkinson's suggestion (2012, p. 120) that researchers can observe how the participants construct their views during the discussion/debate with the rest of the group; but it goes beyond this in intentionally treating focus groups as an opportunity for mutually developing ideas/views.

What also came out during the focus group session was that participants wanted to be able to express to what they felt needed to be “fed into” policy—based on their concerns and their voices. The point is to make here is that by seeking suggestions and recommendations from participants regarding their experience of focus groups. They felt that they had learnt from one another about what they were trying to do to address felt challenges; and that by hearing our responses/comments



as well as our way of posing questions for additional reflection, this helped them to reinforce their discussions.

To supplement data Focus Group discussion were held with the stakeholders forming exclusive and combined groups as per details below:

Table 1. FGD Groups of the Stakeholders

Parents		Teachers	
Districts/Venue	Members	Districts/Venue	Members
Hoshiarpur- (DC complex)	8	Patiala-(GPS Ghanour)	4
Ropar(GPS, Chamkaur Sahib)	10	Jalandhar - (GPS Daulatpur)	4
Administrative Group			
Districts/Venue	Number	Membership	
MUKTSAR (D.E.O. OFFICE)	6	D.E.O., Distt. Coordinator, 4 SSA members	
Hoshiarpur (GPS Kandowal)	13	Deputy D.E.O., DSE, Physiotherapist (10 IERTs)	
Faridkot (BPEO Office)	5	D.S.E., Physiotherapist, 3 SSA Members	
Fatehgarh(GPS Sirhind)	12	D.S.E., Physiotherapist, 10 IERTs	
Ludhiana (SSA Office)	17	Distt. Coordinator, DSE, 15 IERTs	
Ropar ( GPS Chamkaur Sahib)	5	D.S.E., IERT, 3 Teachers	

In accordance with the objective, discussions were held with the stakeholders involving:

- District level administrators group/DEO's/Coordinators, SSA staff, Inclusive Education Resource Teachers (IERT's), Physiotherapists.
- Parents' group
- Teachers' group.

The focus of the discussion centered round:

- Inclusive education and its benefits and impact on special need children
- The stakeholders' satisfaction with the type of education provided in Resource Room.
- Type of strategies used in teaching and learning, and activities carried out in the Resource Rooms, Regular class-room to facilitate teaching and learning of Children with Special Need (CWSN).
- Usefulness of Home Based Education (HBE) and Bridge Courses for CWSN.
- Adequacy of teaching-learning material and equipment in Resource Rooms.



- Proficiency of IERTS and Regular Education Teachers in handling children with different challenges and needs.
- Aids and appliances provided in distribution camps.

**The overall outcome of discussion sessions was in the form of:**

- Lacuna in implementation of the scheme
- Positive and negative comments of the participants
- Pointing out difficulties in implementation of Inclusive Education scheme
- Suggestions and recommendations made by the groups

**COMMON POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE VIEWS OF ALL THE GROUPS**

**Plus Points**

**Usefulness of inclusive education**

- Inclusive Education is beneficial for CWSN, as it is helpful in social adjustment of the children with special needs
- Inclusive Education, and the type of education provided in Resource Rooms are proved to be useful in bringing improvement in CWSN with respect to:  
Daily Living Skills like eating, sitting, talking in a proper manner etc.
- Some students with special needs have developed interest in learning Maths, English etc. to be at par with regular class-room students
- The members of the groups appreciated the utility of the distribution camps organised for CWSN.
- Most of the parents appreciated the attitude of IERTS and the regular class-room teachers towards their children.
- Most of the parents willingly send their CWSN to the school as they came to know about the provision of education for CWSN in Resource Rooms, through surveys conducted by Teachers and Resource teachers till date.

**Loopholes**

**Attitude of heads, teachers, and parents**

- The **Head Teachers** are not actively involved in implementing of Inclusive Education and the functions of the Resource Room. Some of them do not know what I.E. is about.
- **Teachers** are not willing to accept CWSN in regular class-room, though they have attended training about Inclusive Education
- **Parents' Attitude:** HBE is not very successful because some parents are least bothered to take the responsibility of their own children with challenges. They shirk to take care of their differently abled children, perhaps due to their economic constraints. They avoid spending on medical treatment of their children. Even some of the parents do not bother to collect the equipment for their children from the Distribution Camps.
- **District Coordinators** have not specialized in Inclusive Education. They are not in a position to provide necessary guidelines to District Special Educators (DSE's).
- **Designing of Individualised Educational Plan (IEP).** There is no clear instructions regarding designing of IEPs for CWSN
- **IQ Testing** There is no provision of IQ testing in Resource Rooms and even IERT's are not trained in testing IQ of CWSN in Resource Rooms.





## LACUNA IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE SCHEME

- There is a **lack of vocational education** in the curriculum of CWSN which could help the children to become self dependent.
- The time **table provided by SSA is difficult to follow** as Resource Rooms are not equipped with necessary resources.
- Likewise, **the goals determined/set** in Individualized Education Programme (IEP) are practically **not achievable** because of the rigid time table.
- It is **difficult to get certificates of disability for CWSN** as these are not prepared at Block level, because of the procedure which is cumbersome. Parents are not in a position to afford to go to the hospitals to get the certificate.
- Regular class-room teachers rarely visit the Resource Rooms.
- None of the schools have made special arrangements to accommodate CWSN in regular class-rooms.
- Whether in Resource Rooms or in Regular class-room, **the strategies specified for teaching and evaluation of the CWSN are not used.**
- **SSA funds are not released on time** which affects the education of CWSN in Resource Room.
- The **Resource Rooms are ill equipped** with respect to resource support, TLM and assistive devices for CWSN

## SUGGESTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The members of focus group discussions made following suggestion and recommendations:

- Early childhood care and intervention is required to detect disability at earlier stage so that necessary care can be given to the CWSN.
- Most importantly, curriculum should be framed keeping in view the disabilities and needs of CWSN Textbooks to be designed for CWSN should be user friendly.
- The emphasis of I.E. must be on inculcating critical thinking and decision making in CWSN.
- As the coordinators deputed at district level are not specialized in inclusive education, DSE's need guidelines from experts and professionals for the successful implementation of I.E.
- Teachers should be given adequate training for handling CWSN in regular classrooms.
- Teachers were in favour of using more and innovative TLM for CWSN in Resource Room.
- Parents believed that to make inclusion successful, infrastructural facilities need to be improved in schools. They were in favour of separate Resource Room for CWSN to be equipped adequately according to needs of special children..
- Parents suggested that they should be given training which will help them to cater to the needs of CWSN at home also.
- Vocational courses need to be started so that the CWSN become independent.
- Medical treatment of CWSN is very costly. Since mostly parents of CWSN belong to low social economic status, so, medical facilities should be provided free of cost as suggested by parents.
- Physiotherapy sessions need to be increased to bring improvement in CWSN.
- Research is needed in the field of IE. Training from professionals of IE is required for teachers and coordinators.
- Networking with NGO's could be established for providing more facilities to CWSN.
- The outcomes of the Focus Group Discussion were in time with the results of interaction held with IERT's, Teachers, and parents.



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