Well-being for the less fortunate: Is Inclusive Education the way?

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Abstract: Talking about well-being is incomplete without taking into account all sections of society. Every component of society contributes to the well-being of every individual in that society, as well as the environment in which that society nestles. Special children and their care are an extremely sensitive and germane issue in today's world. The paper explores the relationship of the well-being of special children through implementation of inclusive education strategies and the impact of that on every section of Indian society. Categorizations of special children needs along with a brief description of problems faced by them has been provided, followed by strategies such as UDL, SEL, PBIS, intensive counselling and teacher preparation. Fostering positive school culture and creating a sense of belonging will bring in ultimate well-being for society. All psychological theories of well-being point out that an individual feels fulfilled when his creative as well as philanthropic faculties are utilized for personal, professional and social good. Well-being is about addressing the last mile, compassion and resources reaching the lowest rung, people who are considered incapable of leading even a normal life. That is what true inclusion is described as, and it brings in the most intense sense of well-being.
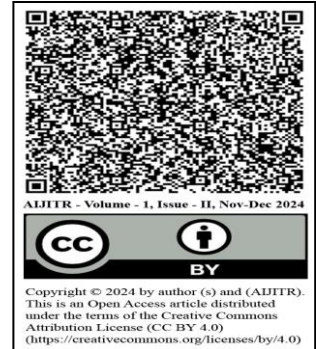
Key words: Inclusive education, Wellbeing, motivation, counselling, UDL, SEL, PBIS.

Introduction:

The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education (RTE) Act, 2009, which represents the consequential legislation envisaged under Article 21-A, means that every child has a right to full time elementary education of satisfactory and equitable quality in a formal school which satisfies certain essential norms and standards. Education for All (EFA) is a global movement led by UNESCO, which aimed to provide quality basic education for all children, youth and adults. But not all children and youth get equal opportunities, particularly special children who are different from their compatriots, who have special needs to survive and be educated in this world.

According to UNESCO, inclusive education is seen as "a process of addressing and responding to the diversity of needs of all learners through increasing participation in learning, cultures and communities, and reducing exclusion from education and from within education." **"Inclusive education" is a new approach towards educating the children with disabilities and learning difficulties with normal children under the same roof, in the same classrooms. It seeks to address the learning needs of all children with or without disabilities, by making them able to learn together through access to common pre-school provisions, schools and community educational settings.** Though it is a difficult task, it is achievable with an appropriate network of support services. Sspecial education is instruction that is specifically designed to meet the unique needs of children who are defined as CWSN.

CWSN can be classified into various categories such as physical disabilities, learning and intellectual disabilities and also emotional disabilities. Children belonging to these categories need different types of help and interventions, but one thing is always common; they need encouragement and the feeling that they too are a part of humanity, they too should have the opportunity to live and work with other people and become regular citizens of the world. One fact that cannot be ignored is that CWSN require regular help, training and counselling and people with very severe disabilities may find it extremely difficult to be with the mainstream, but the educational system

needs to constantly work in this regard, in terms of knowledge, manpower and infrastructural support to provide the window to these children to hope, to interact with others and gear towards an independent life.

Classification of CWSN:

The children with special needs can be classified as below:
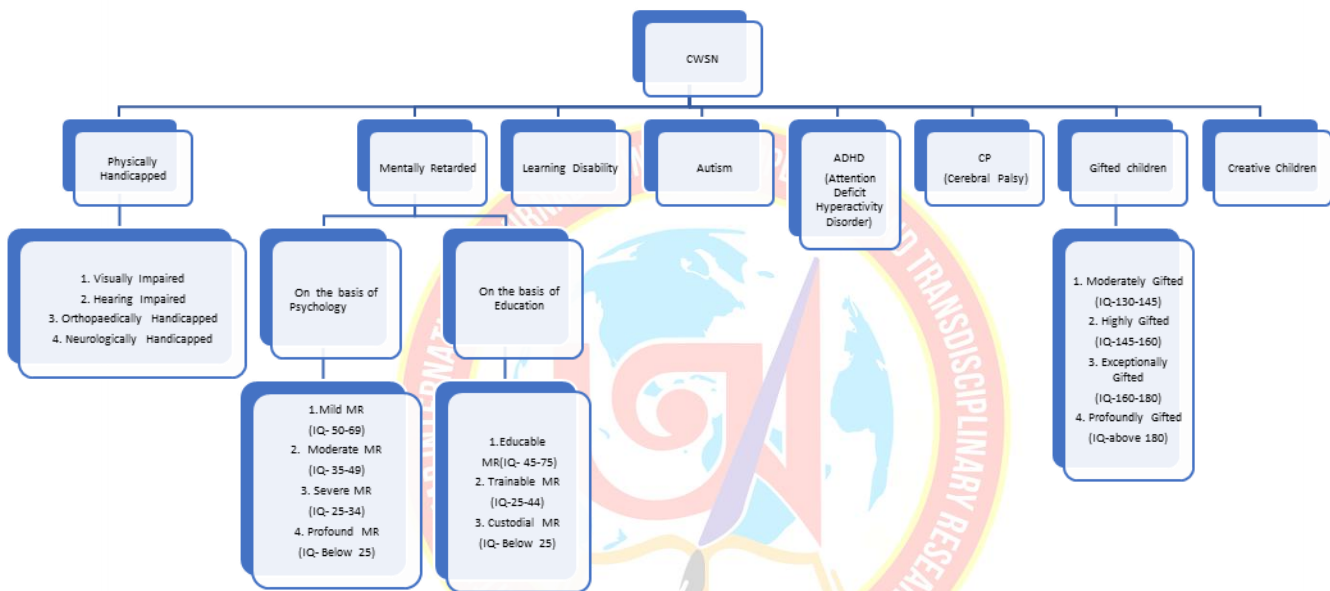
A) **Physically handicapped**: A physical disability is a limitation on a person's physical functioning, mobility, dexterity or stamina. They can be further classified as below:

a) Visually impaired,

b) Hearing impaired,

c) Orthopedically handicapped,

d) Neurologically handicapped

B) **Mentally retarded child:** Mental retardation is an intellectual disability that results in intellectual capabilities significantly below average. Mental retardation can interfere with learning, the ability to care for oneself, and the ability to meet general societal expectations about how to behave. It is generally defined as an IQ below 70.

C) **Learning disability:** A learning disability is a disability that affects a person's ability to process information. People with learning disabilities possess an average to above-average IQ. Dyslexia, dysgraphia, dyscalculia, dyspraxia are the common types of learning disability.

D) Autism: A serious developmental disorder that impairs the ability to communicate and interact. Autism spectrum disorder impacts the nervous system and affects the overall cognitive, emotional, social and physical health of the affected individual.

E) ADHD: ADHD stands for attention deficit hyperactivity disorder. It is a medical condition. A person with ADHD has differences in brain development and brain activity that affect attention, the ability to sit still, and self-control. ADHD can affect a child at school, at home, and in friendships.

F) Cerebral Palsy (CP): CP is the most common motor disability in childhood. Cerebral means having to do with the brain. Palsy means weakness or problems with using the muscles. CP is caused by abnormal brain development or damage to the developing brain that affects a person's ability to control his or her muscles.

G) Gifted Children (IQ above 130): Gifted children are, by definition, "Children who give evidence of high-performance capability in areas such as intellectual, creative, artistic, leadership capacity, or specific academic fields, and who require services or activities not ordinarily provided by the school in order to fully develop such capabilities." Gifted children are of four types:

(i) Moderately Gifted (IQ 130-145),

(ii) Highly Gifted (IQ 145-160),

(iii) Exceptionally Gifted (IQ 160-180) and

(iv) Profoundly Gifted (IQ above 180).

H) Creative Children: Creativity is the act of turning new and imaginative ideas into reality. Creativity is characterized by the ability to perceive the world in new ways, to find hidden patterns, to make connections between seemingly unrelated phenomena, and to generate solutions. Creativity involves two processes: thinking, then producing.

In the year 1990 The individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) gives the definition of MR as, "Mental Retardation refers to significantly sub-average general intellectual functioning, existing concurrently with deficits in adaptive behaviour and manifested during the developmental period that adversely affects a child's educational performance."

MR children can be classified further according to **the psychological stage.** MR children can be seen as:

- ✓ **Mild MR-**-IQ 50-69
- ✓ **Moderate MR**--IQ 35-49
- ✓ **Severe MR--**IQ 25-34
- ✓ **Profound MR**--IQ Below 25

They can also be classified on the basis of the amount of help they need for intellectual achievement. So, according to how much they can grasp the concepts and deal with the environment around them, the MR children can be:

(i)**Educable MR (IQ 45-75) (Mild MR and Moderate MR)** - these children can be taught through the formal education system with help, guidance and support. They can be incorporated in classrooms with normal children, though they will need constant supervision and their progress maybe slower.

(ii)**Trainable MR (IQ 25-44) (Severe MR)** - these children find it difficult to do even the basic tasks of clothing and feeding themselves on their own difficult, but they can be made to learn to do so through training, practice and

encouragement. They can be incorporated in the school system with constant expert supervision and their learning progress is going to be constantly very weak.

(iii)**Custodial MR (IQ - below 25) (Profound MR)**- these children are unable to even move themselves without a lot of help and medical supervision. It is not possible to make them learn, and they generally have to be institutionalized.

	I.Q. RANGES																
	100	95	90	85	80	75	70	65	60	55	50	45	40	35	30	25	20	15
On the basis of Psychology							Mild						Moderate		Severe		Profound
On the basis of Education (Receive and Retention Power)						Educable							Trainable			Custodial	

At least the educable MR children need to get the learning experience in the normal school, be part of the inclusive education principle, and every society in all countries have to try to provide that to them. But it is not easy, they do face a lot of problems, and those need to be discussed. What are the problems they face, what are the possible solutions and how to give them the facility to improve so that they can adapt to at least some life situations, are the areas which are focussed on in the present study. Educational research needs to focus on mental retardation and the efforts that are being made, and can be made to educate mentally retarded children so that they can lead reasonably independent lives, at least those children who are educable (IQ-45-75).

Day after day many developments are occuring in the field of special education, but as long as the children remain socially isolated and psychologically lacking in self esteem, their life really doesn't get much better. Moreover, a lot of children are denied access to these developments as long as they are not part of the education system. Through inclusive education, the attempt to give the best possible educational and social support to the mild and moderate MR child with the normal children in the normal schools has to be made, even though the MR child may not always be able to fulfill requirements in different aspects of educational life. They should be helped to face and overcome obstacles in all cases. It is important to find out the various problems of inclusion of MR children and their best solutions.

We have observed MR children very closely during special B.Ed courses, and have been touched by their warmth and their need to belong. Thus the decision came along for writing and working in the field of special education if the chance presented itself. The MR children do have problems related to their inclusion, we as a society are not doing enough for such human beings, and this study will be a step towards working for their betterment. No social isolation for any human being of the world can be the aim of education in society. It is easy for us to separate people who are different, who do not conform to the normal patterns of behaviour of human society and that is why we all are guilty of segregation of CWSN, one way or the other. This work tries to break this habit of human beings and try to find solutions, so that MR children participate in all aspects of social life, and the concept of well being can be applied to

them and people around them too. Also, there is an urgent need for further action research of applying solutions in real life situations, and teacher training based on such research.

Meaning and Concept of Well-being in the Context of 21st-Century Education:

Well-being is defined by the Oxford English Dictionary as "*the state of being comfortable, healthy, or happy.*" However, it is important to realise that well-being is a much broader concept than moment-to-moment happiness. While it does includes happiness, it also includes other things, such as how satisfied people are with their life a whole, their sense of purpose, and how in control they feel. Well-being is more than just the absence of illness; it's a holistic state of feeling good and functioning well, encompassing various aspects of life. Well-being encompasses a positive state of being, encompassing physical, mental, emotional, and social health, and is linked to happiness, life satisfaction, and the ability to contribute meaningfully to the world. In this respect, the New Economics Foundation describes well-being as the following:

"*Well-being can be understood as how people feel and how they function, both on a personal and a social level, and how they evaluate their lives as a whole*".

The World Health Organization (WHO) defines well-being as

"*a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being, and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity*" (*WHO, 1948*). This definition highlights the importance of considering the whole person – physical, mental, and social – when addressing well-being.

Well-being has become a crucial aspect of education in the 21st century. As we navigate the complexities of modern life, it's essential to prioritize well-being in our educational systems. The meaning and concept of well-being can only make sense if every individual of society can bask in it, and thus the need of the hour is providing a foundation for understanding its significance in 21st-century education.

We must also consider how external conditions (such as income, housing and social networks) and a person's internal resources (such as optimism, resilience and self-esteem) can affect their well-being. In this respect, how we go about measuring well-being is as challenging as it is worthwhile.

Key Components of Well-being:

Physical Well-being: Feeling healthy, energetic, and having a strong body.

Mental Well-being: Having a positive outlook, managing stress effectively and maintaining a healthy mindset.

Emotional Well-being: Experiencing a range of emotions appropriately, developing emotional resilience and having strong self-awareness.

Social Well-being: Having positive relationships, feeling connected to others and contributing to society.

Related Concepts:

Happiness and Life Satisfaction: Well-being is strongly linked to these feelings, indicating a positive overall evaluation of one's life.

Meaning and Purpose: Having a sense of purpose and contributing to something larger than oneself is a crucial aspect of well-being.

Resilience: The ability to bounce back from challenges and setbacks is a key indicator of well-being.

Can we really measure well-being?

We try to look at well-being neatly arranged in boxes, and that is exactly what makes it even more elusive. Well-being is measured for families and societies by rating agencies, social scientists, marketing and counselling professionals and a host of other agencies through various methods, including questionnaires, interviews, and observations. Some studies focus on specific aspects of well-being, such as mental health or social support. Though the results may not be exact or even general, it is a fact that measuring well-being helps us to evaluate the impact of various life services on people's lives, but also which aspects of their lives people feel most dissatisfied with – which can help society to tailor

our services, work, research to meet their needs. It definitely means looking at how people are 'in themselves', how well they feel they are coping with everyday life and how hopeful and confident they are about achieving their personal goals.

Theories of Well-being:

The concept of well-being is highly personal, subjective, phenomenological, so it would probably not be fair to bind it in terms of set theories of psychology or management. But we can find it's echoes in a lot of theories for education and development. Some of them are discussed as follows:

1. Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs: Human beings have different levels of needs, ranging from basic physiological needs to self-actualization (Maslow, 1943), and those needs being fulfilled, can induce a sense of well-being.

2. Self-Determination Theory: The three innate psychological needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Deci & Ryan, 2000) give humans purpose, identity and esteem, when their 'I' stands tall, sense of well-being ensues.

3. Positive Psychology: This approach focuses on promoting mental well-being by cultivating positive emotions, strengths, and resilience (Seligman, 2011).

Factors Influencing Well-being:

Several factors can influence well-being, including:

1. Genetics: Genetic predispositions can affect well-being.

2. Environment: Environmental factors, such as socioeconomic status, financial stability and access to resources, can impact well-being. Moreover, A healthy and safe environment is also crucial.

3. Life experiences: Traumatic events, relationships, and life experiences can shape well-being.

4. Cultural and societal factors: Cultural and societal norms, values, and expectations can influence well-being. Strong social support networks and positive relationships are vital.

Can Inclusive Education Foster Well-being?

Inclusion is at the heart of education in any society, the mission of education is to create systems of mutual trust, respect and understanding integral to the success of every student, every business, every task of nation building.

Well-being is closely related to inclusive education in several ways:

1. Sense of Belonging: Inclusive education promotes a sense of belonging among students, which is essential for their emotional and social well-being.

• Reduced Stigma: Inclusive education helps reduce stigma and discrimination, creating a safe and supportive environment that promotes well-being.

• Increased Self-Esteem: Inclusive education encourages participation, engagement, and success, leading to increased self-esteem and confidence among students.

• Emotional Well-being: Students' emotional well-being is critical for their ability to learn, participate, and engage in education, and when they feel they are included, magical changes happen in them.

• Resilience: Students' resilience and ability to cope with challenges are essential for their success in life, and inclusion builds it up by challenging them safely, intuitively.

• Social Connections: Strong social connections and relationships among students, teachers, and peers, provided in inclusion are vital for creating a supportive learning environment for special children so that they can reach out to the world and achieve an independent existence.

Barriers to Inclusive Education:

Inclusive education needs to take away the following negatives from the life of special children, even normal children to an extent:

- **Exclusion and Isolation:** Exclusion and isolation can lead to decreased well-being, increased stress, and reduced self-esteem among students.

- **Bullying and Harassment:** Bullying and harassment can have severe negative impacts on students' well-being, mental health, and academic performance for every student

- **Lack of Accessibility:** Inaccessible learning environments, whether due to geography or infrastructure or simple social ridicule can create barriers to participation, engagement, and success, negatively impacting students' well-being.

Strategies to Promote Well-being in Inclusive Education:

- **Universal Design for Learning (UDL):** Implement UDL principles to create inclusive and accessible learning environments, utilising AI, CAI and Indian Knowledge Systems.

 2. **Social-Emotional Learning (SEL):** Integrate SEL into the curriculum to promote emotional intelligence, self-awareness, and social skills.

- **Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS):** Implement PBIS to create a positive and supportive school culture, that would rely more on group efforts and criterion referenced evaluation, giving less importance to numbers.

- **Mental Health Support:** Provide access to mental health support services, such as counseling and therapy, to promote students' well-being.

- **Integrate well-being into the curriculum:** Incorporate well-being into subjects like physical education, health education, and social studies.
- **Provide counseling services:** Offer counseling services to support students' mental health and well-being.
- **Foster a positive school culture:** Encourage a positive school culture that promotes social connections, empathy, and inclusivity, with the help of activities, field trips, social service and craft.
- **Support teacher well-being:** Provide resources and support to promote teacher well-being, as teachers play a critical role in promoting student well-being.
 By recognizing the interconnectedness of well-being and inclusive education, educators can create supportive and inclusive learning environments that promote the well-being and success of all students. To employ the methodology listed above it is essential to build tools and collect comprehensive data points, so as to look at multi perspective solutions. There is a need for:

- Knowing about the habits and nature of special child with empathy and depth.

- Identifying the educational problems faced by them, taking into account their difficult journeys towards even small tasks, with the help of detailed Observation Schedules to gauge the educational environment of these children

- Identifying the social problems faced by them, in not just physical terms, communication terms but facing prejudice and bad behaviour .

- Discussing the views of educators and caretakers on inclusive education, with specific inputs and outcomes. For getting this data, we can use Questionnaires for teachers of regular schools to know their views on inclusive education, as in the future, they need to prepare themselves to help and teach at least some of these children. Also, we can use Structured Interviews for SE Teachers, to know the problems and expected solutions for special children. Only after detailed information of the stakeholders, we can begin designing learning systems suitable

for heterogeneous groups of normal and special children.

- Identifying the barriers in the socialization of special children in normal school and to highlight the aspects of possible solutions. Such information will be not easy to get, as people won't confess to negative attitudes. A detailed Questionnaire for the guardians of special children can provide us a treasure trove of justifiably painful but rich insights.

Tthen we can begin indicatein some possible techniques which may reduce the problems of these child in normal schools and a true sense of inclusion and well-being may become the norm instead of the exception.

Conclusion:

Well-being is a complex and multifaceted concept that encompasses physical, mental, social, and emotional aspects. Understanding the meaning and concept of well-being is crucial for promoting holistic education in the 21st century. By recognizing the importance of well-being and incorporating it into our educational systems, we can foster a more supportive, inclusive, and empowering learning environment. But for that to happen, we have to do away with isolation, cloistering and embarrassing ability groupings of normal children as well as special children. Bringing them together in education will be powerful messaging for caring and sharing in a society that is largely become very self-serving and hedonistic, leading to a true sense of well-being for all it's citizens.

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