



## RESEARCH IN SPECIAL EDUCATION IN INDIA

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### ABSTRACT

*Research in the field of exceptional children is taking off at a very slow and insignificant level in India. Virtually it has low priority among professionals. The attempts to implant all western ideas and principles will not pay divided unless indigenous techniques and procedures are developed through research and development of materials. Research is in the areas of developing learning potential assessment device which is common to all areas of disability. Conceptually, it should focus on psycho-educational characteristics of the handicapped, efficacy of delivery systems community based programmes, curriculum modifications, developmental research on instructional system, management of educational environment, research in Piagetian Framework with the disabled, assessment techniques based on cultural specifics are in dire need in our country, with cooperative and partnership endeavour since the field of handicap is a complex area and therefore can rarely be handled at an individual level.*

#### **Introduction**

Research and developmental activities in the education of exceptional children have emerged in recent years as areas of concern for educational researchers. Whatever research has been done in different areas of disability is more of an organizational and institutional nature. It is, therefore, a piecemeal academic exercise neither reflecting a view-point based on our socio-cultural ethos nor leading to any viable practical application. Excepting biomedical researchers in mental retardation, researches have predominantly been in the areas of attention, learning and memory, but often dealing with tasks that have less relevance in the classroom setting. A few researches cover the ground in the area of applied behaviour analysis and behaviour modification.

Researches in the area of speech and language disability are rather more rigorous but are confined to a particular institute and more in the line of therapeutic frame. Research in the true sense has not reached an appreciable degree of acceptance so far as assessment of educability and remediation programmes are concerned in the area of visual, auditory and

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orthopaedic impairments. The Journal of Mental Retardation, Journal of the Institute of Speech and Hearing, Indian Journal of Disability and Rehabilitation are almost extinct after pious beginning and headway. Disability and Impairments continues with larger input from medical field than from educational sector. The Fourth Survey of Research and the Fifth Survey of Research in Education are eloquent testimony. This then is the picture when we are thinking of research and development in special education in India. There are various constraints responsible for such a backdrop. Lack of trained personnel, lack of institutional support, late recognition of the idea that disabled children within the mild or educable range can be trained, and several other socio-cultural constraints. This situation has slightly changed but is not very conducive to extensive and intensive studies and developmental activities in the area, primarily because of lack of organised effort by the specialists in the respective areas of disability.

There is hardly any interaction and dissemination forum for research. Of course since the 1980's, National Institutes in the major areas of disability (Blind, Deaf, Orthopaedically handicapped, Mentally Retarded) and Institutes for Speech and Hearing, B.M. Institutes of Mental Health, etc. have been focusing attention on research and research based and related developmental activities. This is a significant step in this direction. In addition, University Departments of Education at Jamia Millia, Banaras, SNDT, R.K. Mission Institute at Coimbatore and Andhra University, etc. have opened up Special Education Departments. Finally, NCERT, through Regional Colleges of Education and its unit at headquarters has taken up the challenge of starting systematic research, teacher training and development of instructional material in four major areas of disability. Staff has been trained in and outside the country. It is, therefore against this backdrop we must plan our research which will provide continuity and comprehensive data based understanding of the process in which the disabled child can gainfully be helped to learn within the limits of their educability, feasibility and practical application. Especially, it will also be able to give a picture of education and training of disability in India, based on collaborative national level research wherever the approach is normative and at institutional and individual level where the need is specific. Keeping these broad goals and background, a perspective of research has been given with some hints of research areas and topics of interest in general.

### **Recent Developments in Research in India**

It is true that recent years have noticed a change from medical diagnosis to multi professional assessment, treatment to education, categorization to individualized needs programme, category specific needs (Evans and Verma, 1990; Pandey and Advani, 1995). Yet research in India has not made much headway in the field of special education. Perspectives for education of the disabled has been provided by Narsimhan and Mukerjee (1986), research (Panda, 1974) rehabilitation but most of what is available in psycho educational research on disability are quite limited. Quite a few significant studies have appeared under the guidance



and involvement of individual researchers than of institutes, big and large. Noted amongst them are the contributions of Prof. A.K. Sen and Prof. (Mrs.) A. Sen at Delhi University with reference to mental retardation and specifically on learning and memory processes (Das, 1968; Goel and Sen, 1985), Psychosocial integration of the handicapped (Sen, A., 1983, 1988) and under the guidance of Prof. K.C. Panda on response cost and positive reinforcement (Myreddi, 1995), peer modelling (Narayan, 1992), self injurious behaviour (Peshwaria, 1993), community attitudes (Panda, B., 1992), integrated education of orthopedically handicapped (Rath, 1993), reading comprehension of the deaf (Sahoo, 1995), personality structure of blind (Khan, 1990), isolation effect on learning (Panda, P. 1995), etc. are among the significant ones. National Institute of Mental Health has also researched into skill development in mental retardation. Several researches have also appeared on blind, blind relief association, National Association of the Blind, NIVH and individually (Pannikar, 1978; Panda and Panda, 1995). The area of disability receiving much attention at the doctoral level research are mental retardation, visual impairment, gifted, hearing handicapped and learning disabled during the last decade but the number of researches are very few and quality wise are only contributory to understanding the disabled. Researches have concentrated more on, learning, memory, attention, personality, community attitudes, efficacy of systems but has hardly are oriented towards interventions but a few aimed skill development, development of learning package. National Institutes, NCERT, university departments have not catered to significant research but contributed more to education and training of personnel for handling the disabled. Efficacy studies, have come up recently (Mani, 1993; Rath, 1993) but researches taken as a whole in the field of special education are in an embryonic state.

There is no denying the fact that even till now the area of disability has remained as an area of welfare, rehabilitation and care than research, development and education. Both the directions are important and research can well integrate the two to the advantage of the disabled.

### **Where do we go from here?**

This is a question which is difficult to answer but professionals irrespective of speciality in the field of disability must concentrate basically on issues and problems, which are relevant to educational and rehabilitation aspects by and large. Areas of research would systematically include: assessment test and checklist development in each area of disability; its regional translation and adaptation; standardization of functional behaviour checklists even conditions of adaptation from western countries; measurement of change of progress in disabled children as a result of training, ecological intervention, parental involvement, and establishment of cultural norms for clinical as well as research use; prevalence of disability, its incidence in rural-urban set up, incidence rate, socio-demographic antecedents and consequences. A major focus of our research endeavours must specify comparative studies on different therapeutic interventions and practices, sensory stimulations much early in the process of development



and identify efficient procedures for developmental quotient and not merely IQ changes, competence, skills and social personal adjustment would be the primary focus leading to school readiness. Such research areas are painstaking and challenging but worth undertaking. Special education in our country is an emerging field but there are many sound research generalisations elsewhere the field had an earlier origin. It is time for us to think and say on the basis of our own studies whether home based interventions are any way better than the institution based intervention, integrated system versus the special system, efficacy of community based rehabilitation and family studies. Public attitudes, acceptance and awareness are to be assessed and manipulated through various awareness programme since disability seen in home is sustained because of negative attitudes and stigma by the society. How far rights of disabled are ensured or are they still discriminated against legal background? Disability occupation-fit studies are essential for initiating training using a global socially desirable approach to draw attention or pay a lip service to the vital areas.

Technology has come in a big way. How can it be used to the advantage of the disabled?—in terms of aids and appliances, classroom learning, teaching, self-learning, mastery learning, evaluation: diagnostic as well as normative, micropocessors and their use in case of teaching the disabled. Many such issues will appear. These are some directions only. While disability specific research is a matter of individual concern these are some of the area that come in any area of disability.

### **How do we go from here?**

#### **The Methodology**

Behavioural scientists tend to be obsessed by their methods often at the expense of their results. It is not proper to enter into any philosophical debate on the process nor can any methodological formula for scientific research be formulated. The principal way of attending competence is to do it and develop insight. These methodological issues relate to designs in research, sampling frame and to size, qualitative versus quantitative research techniques. The field of special education is fraught with many such issues since researchers in special education have migrated from other disciplines with their well established rigid, hard core or soft-core training and temperament. What needed is that researchers in special education should take care of the methodological issues even when they use qualitative research techniques for fact finding, participant observation, interviewing, documentation and review. The fact should remain that it should maintain credibility, transferability, dependability, confirmability, authenticity and fairness.

#### **A Perspective**

It is difficult at this stage to speculate and think of research on disability from a futuristic angle yet it is a part of programme building and research planning process. Research in future

and particularly in 21st century will be more concerned with avoidance of discriminatory practices and maintenance of human rights so that disabled children have full participation in society. Hence, community research will get our priority besides legislative activism. But this is open direction, what is more crucial for this group is that disability is more often accompanied by mental problems. Hence, research in mental health, psychiatric social work, psychological interventions are and should be points of reference in planning research activities. In the field of education, will the future years see changes in educational index but what of disabled children? Can improved educational opportunities be extended to this group? Can inclusive education benefit the disabled or it is a medium of our self preservation exercise and instinct. If not, research in the next decade should focus on the development of functional skill training, even using computer technology and computer aided instructions:

- a) Allow students to proceed at a more individual pace, thereby reducing stigmas.
- b) Enable developmentally disabled to work at home.
- c) Provide learning aids specifically designed for a group of disability.

In summary, research in the next decade and ahead should focus on:

- a) Identification of available services and resources.
- b) Development of learning potential assessment device test as basis of diagnosis.
- c) Epidemiological investigation of the disabled population.
- d) Research and advocacy of treatment approaches and techniques.
- e) Community integration with a comprehensive care system and a full operational prevention process.
- f) Identification of individually suitable teaching practices, peer tutoring and modeling, education and service delivery system.
- g) Family studies.

These are but a few reflections but there will be many more if really we are committed to the cause of helping disabled children in our society.

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