



Understanding the Barriers Faced by Children with Disabilities at Schools with Inclusive Set-up in Chandigarh

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Abstract

Inclusive education means including children with disabilities in regular classrooms that have been designed for children without disabilities (Kugelmass, 2004). It refers to an education system that accommodates all children regardless of their physical, intellectual, social, emotional, linguistic or other conditions. The aim of the study was to know the perception of the school principals, class teachers having children with special needs (CWSN), class teacher without CWSN, resource teacher, children with special needs & peer group about the environmental and individual barriers for the children with special needs. A semi structured interview schedule was used which was especially designed for the purpose of this study. The findings of the study suggest that majority of the schools were having physical barriers as these schools lacked ramps or lift, there were no modified toilets as per the needs of CWSN & non availability of signage & tactile flooring in the schools. On the other hand, the attitude of school authorities was cooperative and receptive.

Key words: *Inclusive Education, Barriers, Children with Special Needs, normal schools*

Introduction:

In schools throughout the world, 'inclusion' has been used to refer to the placement of students with disabilities in ordinary classrooms alongside their peers (Kugelmass, 2004). Inclusive education is a pairing of philosophy and pedagogical practices that allow each student to feel respected, confident and safe so that he or she can learn and

develop to his or her full potential. It is based on a system of values and beliefs centered on the best interests of the student, which promotes social cohesion, belonging, and active participation in learning, a complete school experience, and positive interactions with peers and others in the school community. These values and beliefs will be shared by schools and communities. Inclusive education is put into practice within school communities that value diversity and nurture the well-being and quality of learning of each of their members. Inclusive education is carried out through a range of public and community programs and services available to all students.

Right to Education (RTE), 2009 which expands the definition of “child belonging to disadvantaged group” and includes children with disability. It focuses on free & compulsory education to all children of India between 6 to 14 years of age group. No child shall be held back, expelled, or required to pass board examination until completion of elementary education. However, majority of the schools failed to keep pace with the legislation and the existing infrastructure has many limitations for accommodating CWSN. Before the introduction of inclusive education and even now, the special educators have been designing individualised education programme (IEP) for each CWSN with the philosophy that each child is different and has unique needs. The paradigm shift from IEP to group class teaching has not been looked into and it has been concluded that inclusive set up will promote better development for CWSN. However, if the barriers faced by CWSN are not looked into, the whole concept of inclusive education can become a major failure. Thus, it is important that we realise that all children – both children with and without disabilities - face barriers. If these barriers are not addressed properly, children will not be able to reach their full academic, social, emotional, and physical potential. Barriers may therefore be experienced temporarily or permanently depending on how effectively these are addressed and removed. Children with disabilities face both environmental and individual barriers – these two forms of barriers are closely interrelated. These of barriers that need to be reduced, and if possible removed by schools, homes and communities in order for the children concerned to be able to develop to their fullest potential.

The current study was an attempt to investigate various barriers at government schools of Chandigarh where children with disabilities are obtaining education.

Objective :

To study the perception of the school principals, class teacher of children with disabilities, class teacher of children without disabilities, children with special needs, resource teacher and peer group on environmental and individual barriers faced by children with special needs in inclusive set up.

Research Questions:

1. To understand the perception of Principal on environmental and individual barriers faced by children with special needs in inclusive set up.
2. To understand the perception of Class teacher of children with disabilities on environmental and individual barriers faced by children with special needs in inclusive set up.
3. To understand the perception of class teacher of children without disabilities on environmental and individual barriers faced by children with special needs in inclusive set up.
4. To understand the perception of children with special needs on environmental and individual barriers faced by children with special needs in inclusive set up.
5. To understand the perception of Resource Teacher on environmental and individual barriers faced by children with special needs in inclusive set up.
6. To understand the perception of peer group on environmental and individual barriers faced by children with special needs in inclusive set up.

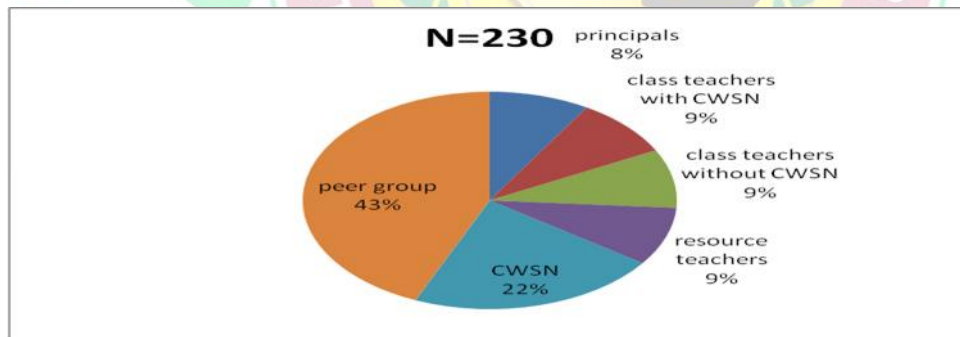
Material and Methods:

Sampling technique: To achieve the objective of study, the cluster sampling method was used to select schools from rural and urban areas of Chandigarh. Whole city was divided into five clusters. The list of schools in that cluster was obtained from the education department. For

the purpose of the study, four schools were selected from each cluster using computer generated random table. Thus, we had total twenty schools randomly where the sample was drawn.

Participants : The total sample consisted of 230 participants which included twenty Principals, twenty class teacher with CWSN, twenty class teacher without CWSN, twenty resource teacher, fifty CWSN, and 100 students from peer group. The researcher took permission from Director Public Instructions (schools). The participants were included after informed consent in case of adults and from both child and their parents in case of minor children and children with disabilities. The CWSN and their group were taken from the same class so that they are in the same age group.

Assessments: A semi structured interview scheduled separately designed for the study was administered to all the participants in Hindi. In order to gather information from the CWSN, the questions were read out to them in the presence of their parents and their parents further translated it in the simpler form and the CWSN was encouraged to express his opinion. The findings were analysed with the help of descriptive statistical method such as frequency and percentages. The findings of the study were qualitatively analysed.



Results and discussion:

The results of the study are discussed separately for each group of participants:

Principals: In response to the question that if parents of CWSN approach you for admission what will be your first reaction and 85% of the principals replied that they will admit CWSN immediately and the rest 15% said that they will be sympathetic towards the child and will refer them to special educational facilities available for these children in the city. In response to the question regarding availability of Special Educator/Resource Teacher in their school, it was reported that 95% schools are having resource teachers. Resource teachers are available

on specified days and they meet the teacher where CWSN is studying. They also demonstrate the teaching methods through use of TLM and adaptive devices. In rest of the 5 % schools having CWSN, normal teacher make them to sit with normal students. Majority of the principals further informed that normal children take pride in helping CWSN in day to day school activities and shows positive attitude.

While exploring the availability of barrier free facilities in the schools, only 60 % of the schools had disable friendly toilets where as the toilets in other schools were not accessible to the CWSN because of their locations or inadequate size of the doors where the wheel chair could not go in. Similarly , the facility of drinking water was not disable friendly as in majority of the schools the children were drinking directly from the taps and CWSN found it difficult to use .There was no provision of ramp in 65% schools till top floor with specified guidelines. About half of them said that facility of ramp is available for the entire floor and rest of the schools neither had ramps nor lift. Evaluation carried out by Department of Education of Groups with Special Needs (DEGSN) NCERT also found that removal of architectural barriers remain limited mainly to creation of ramps, railings and in few places toilets. The investigator found that there was high drop out rate in case of CWSN and the schools could not provide any information about the reasons of high drop out rates. The principals said that it could be because of the transfers of parents and shifting of severe type of CWSN to home based education programme by Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan.

Class Teacher with CWSN: All class teachers with CWSN finds aware about the concept of IE and they described that Inclusive education is education for all types of children under one roof without any difference and it brings all students together in one classroom regardless of their disability. When the questions regarding their personal experience of teaching CWSN was asked, 40% of the teachers said that CWSN are doing better both academically and socially in inclusive settings. The rest 60% of the teachers said that even if they do not learn inclusive setting, they are essential part of our society. More than half of them shared about strengths of inclusive education and narrated change in their methods of teaching and overall attitude towards the students. Many teachers reported that CWSN are hard working, obedient and honest. When the teachers were asked what challenges do you face while teaching CWSN, approximately 66 percent of the teachers said that syllabus is a major challenge which is not only very exhaustive but also very complex. About 40 percent of the teachers said that behavioural problems, mood fluctuations and

medium of teaching are the major barriers. One fourth of the teachers said that these children need extra care & extra time and their classes are already overcrowded. In answer to steps to overcome these barriers, approximately 60% teachers reported that they are not facing major problems in teaching CWSN in the inclusive set up where as rest of the teachers reported that they had been finding it very difficult to teach CWSN with normal children mainly because of slow learning and behavioural problems. The teachers suggested that they need extra time to teach CWSN which is not feasible in the existing set up and they further felt that this can be overcome only when all the schools have full time special teachers rather than visiting on specified days of the week. The teachers also felt that they need training to handle CWSN. About 35% of the teachers felt the need of learning aids/equipments and infrastructural facilities. However, majority of the teachers reported that inclusive education is better as the normal students get an opportunity to meet CWSN and these experiences would remove their fears and apprehensions about CWSN. When the teachers were asked that whether government should reconsider the policy of IE, 75% of the principals and teachers said that it should be reconsider where as 25 % said it should not be reconsidered.

Class Teacher without CWSN: Class teachers without CWSN knew the basic philosophy of IE and were not different from teachers having a CWSN. When the feasibility of IE was explored, majority said that it is difficult but not impossible. The others said that it will only be known once it is tried for sufficient period. However, all the teachers agreed that IE will lead better development of CWSN and will remove misconceptions and fears prevalent in our society. Many teachers shared their experience and said that they themselves had many fears before the admission of children with disability. When they were asked whether the education department should reconsider the policy of IE, half of them said yes, it should be reconsidered as it may have many problems in implementation.

Resource Teachers: When the resource teachers were asked about their role in IE, about 60 percent were clear about their role and said that they help the teachers in handling behavioral problems, preparation of IEP and use of TLM. On the other hand rest 40 percent said that they are not very clear about their role and the schools expects them to teach CWSN which is not possible in few hours per week. Many resource teachers mentioned that half of the schools are not owning the responsibility of teaching CWSN and expects them to take the primary responsibility. When they were asked the general adaptation of CWSN into IE, all of

them reported that children with disability are feeling involved and they enjoy playing with normal children. Other than academics, the schools were not found to face major problem in handling CWSN. When the resource teachers were asked about the possible challenges and difficulties experienced by them in implementing inclusive education in the schools, 35% did not give any response, 20% responded that high Pupil Teacher Ratio is a major problem, poor knowledge of teacher about disability, use of same curriculum for CWSN, inadequate teaching aids and limited capacity of learning are the other major hurdles in the effective implementation of IE. When they were asked the measures to overcome these barriers, 40 percent did not give any suggestions where as rest of them suggested that special educator should be appointed in every school, parent's participation must be increased and modified syllabus should be designed for CWSN.

Study conducted by Das and Kattumuri (2011) Children with Disabilities in Private Inclusive Schools in Mumbai: Experiences and Challenges also supports in their main recommendations included recruitment of resource teachers in proportion to the numbers and needs of the enrolled children with disabilities in a school

Children with Disabilities: The children with disability said that they were enjoying learning together with other learners. When they were asked how do they interact with your peers, 44% said by talking or through sign language and gestures, 44% said by making friends, playing with them and 10% did not give any response. Two CWSN said that they do not interact with them as they do not like them. When they were asked about the difficulties being experienced by them in the IE, 30% said that they are having difficulty in communicating with other students, 12% told that normal children beat them, normal children make fun of them, Recent research findings suggest that vulnerability to bullying cuts across all types of disability (Mishna 2003; Smith and Tippett 2006).12 percent reported that they do not understand what teacher teaches us. However, 38 percent of CWSN said that they don't have any problem. It was not possible to obtain response from 6 percent of CWSN and rest give relative answer. When they were asked whether normal children help them, majority said yes and further said that help is provided in reading, writing, play, in mobility and daily home work.

Peer Group: The peer group was asked whether they approve IE and 90 percent of the children said yes, 5 percent said no and rest 5 percent were not very clear. When they were asked about the nature of help they provide to CWSN, 75 percent said that they make them to sit in the first row, 10 percent said that they give them preference in the sports, 10 percent said that they give them copy if they are not able to note down from the blackboard and the rest said that they give them environment which is full of cooperation and love. When the investigator asked them the benefit if a CWSN is enrolled in their class, 25 percent said that it helps them to understand their needs and help them accordingly, 15 percent that it increases their social acceptance, and 35 percent said that it will benefit them. When the peers were asked about the challenges faced by CWSN in their schools, 20 percent said that CWSN cannot move by themselves, some cannot hear, see and speak, 15 percent said that they were not able to complete their work and they learn very slowly and it delays the speed of whole class. Another 35 percent said that when teacher ask them a question, they do not give any answer and students start making fun of them. When they were asked about the modification in the existing system, majority said that only selected CWSN should be admitted in normal schools who can cope well, there should be separate curriculum for them which is more simple and practical, they should be taught by teachers who know them better, the teaching methods should be different and they should be admitted early in the normal schools. Study conducted by (Ochoa & Olivarez Jr., 1995) that CWSN generally are at risk at later in life who are not accepted by peers in the school.

Summary and Conclusion: The overall situation looks hopeful, but requires urgent attention to address the barriers being faced at different levels. Majority of the principals and teachers are ready to accept their role in the effective implementation of IE, but with many riders. The major changes advocated by them include modification in the curriculum, reduction in the number of students in the class where CWSN is admitted, up gradation of their skills in handling CWSN, regular resource teachers, accessibility to all the floors of the school by providing lifts and ramps and better involvement of parents of CWSN. The peer group has shown their willingness to extend support to CWSN, although they experience difficulty in communicating their desire to help. The best part of the finding is that majority of CWSN are feeling comfortable in the inclusive setting. To the best of knowledge of the authors, this is the first study which has attempted to examine the barriers in the implementation of IE by talking to different stakeholders.

Limitations of study: It was a cross sectional study and the perception and attitude may change over time. The answers might be socially desirable as there is lot of pressure on the teachers to implement IE. The findings may not be applicable to the rural setting as all the schools included in the study were from the urban or semi urban background.

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