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**Summary of ERIC Projects**

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# **A Study on Implementation of Inclusive Education at the Elementary Level in the North-Eastern Region**

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## **Introduction**

Education is the most potent tool for socio-economic mobility and a key instrument for building an equitable and just society. Elementary education provides the foundation for development of education at higher stages. Hence, elementary education needs to be strengthened. The Constitution of India now guarantees eight years of elementary education to each and every child in the country. Elementary schooling consists of five years of primary schooling and three years of upper primary schooling. Primary education motivates a child towards studies and therefore improves his/her interest to firmly proceed forward. Indian government has launched a number of programmes for spreading elementary education in India, including the DPEP of 1994. A new programme launched by the government with regard to improvement of elementary education was SSA in 2001. The programme was launched with an aim to ensure entry, retention and education of children between 6–14 years of age. Inclusive education is an integral component of SSA which promised ‘education for all’ by 2010. Many policies and acts have been legislated to make inclusive education a reality. New policies have been formulated to overcome limitations of previous efforts, such as the Action Plan for Inclusion in Education of Children and Youth with Disabilities (IECYD) and The National Policy for Persons with Disabilities in 2006 which stressed on modifying the existing infrastructure facilities, teaching procedures in order to make it more children friendly.

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Inclusive Education (IE) is the need of the hour. It refers to providing quality education to children with special needs in mainstream schools. This was clarified in the Salamanca Statement and Framework Action (1994), which is a landmark for IE. This statement provides directives for reorganisation of all school activities to facilitate learning of CWSNs in mainstream schools. As per the Statement inclusive schools must reorganise and respond to the diverse needs of their students, accommodating both different styles and rate of learning and ensuring quality education to all through appropriate curricular, organisational arrangements, teaching strategies, resources and partnership with their community. There should be a continuum of support and services to match the continuum of special needs encountered in school. Keeping this in view, systematic changes are required in general education system to meet special educational needs arising out of limitations in learning of each child. In India, integration was a major reform of the 1970s, the need for IE become evident from the fact that despite complete financial support under the IEDC scheme for integrating learners with special needs into the educational system, only 2-3 per cent of the total population of these learners is actually integrated into the regular schools. Dissatisfaction with progress towards integration, the costs involved and the advantages of an inclusive environment in bringing about increased acceptance of learners with SEN, led to the demand for a more comprehensive and drastic change which will benefit all children especially CWSN.

IE emphasise not only education of students with disability but a process through which all students including those with disabilities are educated together in regular mainstream schools, with specially designed, appropriate and adequate support in their neighborhood schools. Hence the goal of IE is to prepare all students, irrespective of academic level or ability, disability, caste, culture, religion, language or ethnic group for life, meet the challenges and requirements to participate as equal partners in the society and to contribute to the development and improvement of the community. Few studies were carried out in India and abroad in the area of IE. In India, extensive studies have been conducted in various issues and practices, such as studies regarding policies and implementation aspects, attitudes and awareness levels, studies about use of different approaches and adaptations of curricular and TLMs as well as classroom strategies. Studies conducted

abroad were mostly regarding the attitudes of stakeholders, such as principals, teachers, parents, students, community as well as educational authorities.

### **Objectives**

The following are the objectives of the study:

1. To identify and study the different components available in the schools for providing quality education for CWSN, such as teachers training, curricular/instructional adaptations, teaching learning process, teaching learning materials, evaluation system.
2. To find out the quality of implementing IE and if children with disability are really benefitting from it or not.

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions were addressed in the study:

1. What are the different components available in the schools for providing quality education for CWSN, such as teachers training, curricular/instructional adaptations, teaching learning process, teaching learning materials, evaluation system?
2. Does inclusive education really benefit the children with disability or is it just mere inclusion?

### **Methodology**

The population for the present study was all the Inclusive Elementary Schools from three North Eastern States of Assam, Meghalaya and Tripura. For the present study a sample of 30 Elementary Schools which provide inclusive education was selected that is 10 from each state. The sample also includes State Authority, teachers, and parents. The tools used for data collection include questionnaire, observation schedule, and interview schedule for the head of the schools, teachers, CWSNs, children without special needs, parents, state educational authority. The data collected was analysed by using qualitative technique.

### **Findings of the Study**

Research specifically in the areas of inclusive education in its totality is still very limited. Hence, the significance or importance of this project is to bridge that gap of not only finding out how far

inclusive education in its truest form has been implemented in the schools of the different states in NER but also whether necessary support system has been provided and whether children with disability are really benefitting from the education provided. The present section is concerned with formulating the generalisations of the findings in respect to implementation of IE.

### **Infrastructure/Facilities Available in the Schools**

From the study it was found that (N=30) 86.66 per cent schools have *pacca* building, 6.66 per cent schools have *kaccha* building. This indicates that majority of the schools have a proper building. Looking at the accessibility for children with disability, the study indicated that majority of the schools have ramps and ramps with handrails, whereas 23.33 per cent schools do not have these facilities. Further, when looking at the availability of toilets, 36.66 per cent schools have toilets which are common for all children, 56.66 per cent of the schools have separate toilets for boys and girls with no toilet facility for disabled children but only 6.66 per cent schools have the facility for a separate toilet for the children using wheelchair. It was also found that majority of the schools (that is 76.66 per cent) were using the traditional bench-desk and chair-table as seating arrangement for the students and only 3.33 per cent of the schools have a special seating arrangement for the children with disability. This shows that facilities which are necessary for the CWSN are not properly provided which might lead to less enrolment and retention of CWSN in mainstream schools. It was found that only 3.33 per cent schools have the required aids and appliances for the children with disability. The unavailability of proper aids and appliances may hamper the performance and progress of children with disability.

### **Academic and Professional Qualifications of Teachers**

Looking at the academic qualifications of teachers, it was found that (N=71) 43.66 per cent, of the teachers are twelfth pass and 5.63 per cent teachers are postgraduate. Again when looking at the professional qualifications of teachers, it was found that out of 71 teachers only 42.25 per cent of the teachers have professional qualification or degree, such as D.El Ed, JBT, BTC, B.Ed (general and Special), NTS and D.Ed which is an essential criteria for teaching children with disability. From these trained teachers only 10 per cent have B.Ed in special education. It is also clear that majority

of the teachers do not possess the professional qualification or any training in inclusive education required to teach at the elementary levels and CWSNs. This study found that inclusive education could be successfully implemented if the level of teacher's competency increased and this can be done if proper training and courses are being given to them which will boost their confidence. When it comes to teachers receiving training programmes in inclusive education, it was found that only 11.26 per cent of the teachers were trained in different kind of training programmes. Very few teachers expressed that special schools are still required as these schools have the facilities meant for CWSN. The study further shows that most of the teachers faced many challenges in their teaching. Around 75 per cent of the teachers expressed lack of training to handle CWSNs which requires special skills, such as sign language to teach children with hearing impairment, knowledge braille to teach visually impaired, adequate skills to teach children who are mentally challenged, etc.

### **Perception of State Education Authorities**

The data collected from the State Education Authority indicated that the states have identified children with special needs and majority of them were enrolled in the different schools. However, the data further indicated that there were no teachers trained in this area. In order to assist CWSNs, resource teachers were engaged at the district level but not appointed for each school. This can hamper or slow down the teaching learning of both teachers and CWSNs. The resource teachers are required to prepare IEP and assessment procedures for each child as per need. When it comes to curriculum adaptation, the states have not yet adapted the curriculum but adaptation is being done by the resource teachers themselves in the classroom as per need. The resource teachers and teachers are also responsible for preparing TLM for CWSNs.

### **Curricular Adaptation by Teachers**

From the data collected it was found that 63 per cent of the teachers use local/state language and 9 per cent use english as their medium of instruction during teaching learning process. It was also found that 16 per cent of teachers use mixed language as there medium of instruction. The study found that majority of the teachers in an inclusive classroom that is 60.56 per cent still follows the traditional approach of teaching without proper modification

to meet the needs of CWSNs. Again, only 15.49 per cent uses instructional strategies as per individual needs. 23.94 per cent of the teachers adopted activity based as instructional strategies so as to cater to the needs of all children. When it comes to TLM used by the teachers in classroom, the study shows that 36.62 per cent teachers used basic TLM present in the class, i.e., picture charts, books, globes, maps. Around 21.13 per cent of teachers actually use modified or adapted teaching aids as per needs, such as 2/3 dimensional figures and shapes, blocks, flash card, soft and hard fabrics, velvet paper, ropes, models, real objects or large print materials and any TLM which are tactile in nature which can augment understanding of concepts. However, 11.27 per cent teachers could not give proper response. When it comes to assessment of CWSNs, only 5.64 per cent of the teachers adapt and modified their method of assessment as per individual needs, such as replacing written test by oral test, writing in braille where the resource teacher transcribes the braille script into print, breaking questions into parts, simplifying questions, assessing through activities and observation and providing additional time.

### **Classroom Observations**

Through classroom observation, it was seen that the classrooms were congested with no space for children especially children with locomotor disability to move freely. However, majority of the classrooms were well ventilated. Further, there were no modifications in seating arrangement for children with special needs except for children with low vision and hearing impaired they were made to sit in front. When it comes to classroom activities/work, it was observed that 38.47 per cent of the children with special needs lacked confidence, were shy and anxious, hesitant to participate and remained aloof whereas 61.53 per cent were active, showed enthusiasm and were ready to learn and happy. It was also seen that teachers tried to involve, motivate and encourage CWSNs to participate in class activities/work. Interestingly, majority of the children without special needs were friendly, helpful and supportive towards their peer group. It was also observed that assessment procedures were carried out in the same way for all children without any adaptation or modification for CWSNs.

### **Students Response**

The present study found that majority of the CWSNs expressed happiness in coming to school making friends, playing and

interacting with other children. However, they also expressed their shyness in participating in the different activities given or assigned by the teachers either inside the classroom or outside. When asked about support from teachers and other children, majority (90 per cent) of CWSNs share their views and opinion that both teachers and other children without special needs support and offer assistance both inside and outside the classroom whenever required. They also expressed that teachers encouraged them in group activities and took help from their classmates whenever required. When asked whether they felt any discrimination from their teachers, all CWSNs responded positively that they did not face any discrimination. However, when it comes to learning inside the classroom, majority of the CWSNs expressed that they had difficulty in understanding lessons taught and felt anxious and hesitant to ask the teacher. They were unable to cope with the classwork and have difficulties in copying down points written on the blackboard. It was also found that teachers had difficulty in helping CWSNs learn as they did not have the skills required. Again, when asked about the facilities provided to them majority of the children did not know about these facilities, such as proper aids and appliances, toilet facilities, used of adapted TLMs, etc.

### **Parents Response**

The parents (75 per cent) were of the opinion that their children enjoy studying in the schools together with other children while 25 per cent said that their children don't enjoy going to school since they face difficulty in adjusting with different activities going on in the school due to their disability which prevents them from doing it. Parents shared that schools do not provide training to them on how to handle and help their children at home. This has put them in difficult situation as they could not help them much at home. When asked if they sent their children to school regularly, around 72.5 per cent of the parents agreed that they sent their children to school regularly while 27.5 per cent of them said that they do not send their children to school regularly as the situation and problems of their children do not favour them to do so. Nearly 48 per cent of the parents agreed with the fact that their children were facing difficulties in learning even though teachers are supportive, Teachers could not provide individual help because of the number of students in the class and also lack of special training on the part of teachers while 52 per cent of parents said that their children do

not face difficulty in learning. However, 64 per cent of the parents shared that the schools motivated and encouraged their children to participate in different activities, like sports and games, drawing, painting, etc. and they enjoyed taking part in these activities. When asked if they attend Parents-Teachers Meeting, 75 per cent of parents said that they do attend Parents-Teachers Meetings (PTM) which of parents were organised regularly and that they shared their problems in these meetings, such as performance of their children, difficulty in understanding classroom teaching learning, facilities in the schools.

### **Conclusion**

The contribution of the study is that the schools as a whole while answering the questionnaires as well as the interview schedules, were made aware of the various requirements needed for making schools really inclusive schools and also the importance of trainings in the field of inclusive education. The schools and teachers are aware that inclusions thus not end in enrolment alone but making a school child-friendly and providing quality education is the need of the hour. From the discussions of the findings it may be concluded that there is still a long way to go for making schools a place where all children irrespective of ability or disability participate, learn and benefit from the education provided to them. Further, we can say that inclusive education is possible if there are appropriate support system provided to all concerns such as required infrastructure and facilities, funding for schools, providing trainings for teachers in the area of IE and aids and appliances and also curriculum adaptations for children.