

The Status of Implementation of Right to Education (RTE) Act, 2009 for Disadvantaged Children in Kerala

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to explore the status of implementation of the Right of children to Free and Compulsory Education (RTE) Act, 2009 for disadvantaged children and children with disabilities in Kerala. Two districts (Thiruvananthapuram and Kollam) with high population of SC/ST/BPL/children with disabilities were selected through purposive sampling. However, respondents in each category were selected using stratified random sampling. Both rural and urban schools (four in Thiruvananthapuram district and five in Kollam district) were selected. A total sample of 66 respondents was selected for this study. Since the study was of in-depth nature, responses of respondents to each item were categorised, and simple descriptive method was used in describing the results. Main findings of the study were that no information was given about SC/ST/ children with disabilities during orientation of RTE, pupil-teacher ratio is 1:50, mid-day meal consumes a lot of time because of formalities involved, children of migrant labourers from other states leave school because of inadequate arrangements for age-appropriate training for placement in different classes, weekly visit by special teacher to children with disabilities is inadequate to ensure proper learning, teachers experience difficulties in teaching different categories of children with disabilities, teachers have not been trained in the area of disabilities, and visually impaired children have not been provided teaching-learning materials individually. Thus, there is a partial implementation of RTE Act, 2009 for children with disabilities in Kerala.

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INTRODUCTION

The Right of children to Free and Compulsory Education (RTE) Act, 2009 passed by the Indian Parliament mandates free and compulsory education of all children of 6-14 years age until they complete elementary education in a neighbourhood school. There is also a reference of children with disabilities in the Act, who are to be given elementary education in the age range of 6-18 year. The Act also has a provision for every child, who is above six years of age and has not yet been admitted to any school or could not complete her / his elementary education due to any reason, to be admitted in a class appropriate to her or his age. The child admitted under age-appropriate admission has a right to receive special training or additional instruction in order to be at par with other children of the class. However, there is an important concern over implementation of RTE Act in the school system with reference to the special training or instruction, its modalities and execution. The states are expected to respond to the situation arising out of the implementation of the Act. States and Union Territories (UTs) are required to pay special attention to cope with the situation in terms of appointment of qualified teachers, development of special training programmes for out-of-school children admitted to age appropriate classes and preparation of relevant teaching learning materials.

This study was conducted by the researcher under the auspices of NCERT New Delhi to find out the status of implementation of various provisions of RTE Act, 2009 in states and UTs for children with disabilities, and disadvantaged children, and concerns and problems of states/UTs to implement the Act. As the Act was implemented with effect from 1 April 2010, states and UTs were supposed to take up preparatory activities in this regard. The study explored the steps taken by states/UTs for implementation of RTE Act, 2009 and their difficulties in proper implementation of the Act. It was important to assess the level of preparedness of states and UTs to take effective steps for the implementation of the Act at various levels. It was also important to assess their readiness in implementing RTE in states/UTs. The readiness of states means awareness of stakeholders to take advantage of the Act. Community awareness is a very important factor in making a programme a success. As such, the study also tried to explore steps taken up by states/UTs in this direction.

Children belonging to disadvantaged groups, *e.g.* SC/ST/BPL, have specific economic and social problems and special focus is needed to ensure RTE to the children of these categories. Various categories of children with disabilities have special needs depending on the nature of disability. Therefore, special aids and appliances, educational

materials, special teacher support and infrastructural modifications are required to ensure RTE to these children. Awareness of inclusive education at all levels – functionaries, head teachers/teachers, parents and community – is of paramount importance and urgent steps in this direction are indispensable. The study explored all these aspects.

Various newspapers reported problems in implementation of RTE Act, 2009 in schools. Times of India New Delhi dated 30 June 2012 reported that only 5 % of the schools were following RTE guidelines. Additionally, there were problems, such as shortage of 10,00,000 teachers, untrained teachers in some places, para-teachers and student-teacher ratio. Times of India New Delhi, dated 2 July 2012 reported that 95 per cent of schools were not complying with the RTE laws. Lack of teachers, infrastructural deficiencies for children with disabilities, violation of age-appropriate admissions were other issues that need urgent attention. Hindustan Times Mumbai, 8 August, 2013 brought out facts where with over 90 per cent of city schools still to meet infrastructure norms required under the Right to Education Act, 2009, the blacklisted schools were given two months to comply with these norms or else face de-recognition. Hindustan Times Mumbai, 20 July 2013 informed that only 103 schools in the city had fulfilled the norms. Hindustan

Times', New Delhi, 17 January 2011 reported the plea of Central Government before the Supreme Court that the Right to Education Act (RTE) applied to private unaided schools, including minority schools and it did not violate any rulings of the top court. "The provisions... regarding grant of admission by private unaided schools, to the extent of at least 25 per cent of the strength of Class I to children belonging to weaker section and disadvantaged group in the neighbourhood and provide free and compulsory elementary education till its completion, in no way curtails the right or autonomy of the private unaided institutions," the HRD ministry said in an affidavit, "The Act is anchored in the belief that values of equality, social justice and democracy and the creation of a just society can be achieved only through provision of inclusive elementary education to all," the affidavit sworn by department of school education and literacy. The Indian Express Ahmedabad, Wed 5 Jun 2013 stated that Three years after the implementation of Right to Education (RTE) Act, the state government passed a resolution to reserve 25 per cent seats for economically weaker section (EWS) and disadvantaged groups in unaided private schools. 'The Hindu', Bangalore of 19 October 2013 reported Father Edward Thomas speech in a conference in which he said that parents and children were victims of various private unaided schools that

were obligated to admit 25 per cent children belonging to “weaker sections of society and disadvantaged groups”. Indian Express New Delhi, Friday, 18 January 2013 pointed out that school-level enrolment rates continue to rise. The Right to Education Act (RTE) helping develop better school infrastructure and there are more toilets for girls in schools. Indian Express Ahmedabad, Monday, 16 January 2012 reported of disturbing student-teacher ratio in Ahmedabad where a shortage of nearly 500 teachers was observed. “Nearly 100 teachers are required in Urdu medium schools because many from Urdu schools, despite existing shortage, have been moved to Gujarati medium schools. ‘Hindustan Times’, Mumbai, 16 May 2011 reported a survey of 600 teachers across 60 SSC schools (30 aided and 30 unaided) by a non-profit group, Parent-Teacher Association United Forum, and found that only 60 per cent of unaided school teachers and 50 per cent of aided school teachers were aware of their duties and responsibilities as enlisted under this Act. While 71 per cent aided school teachers were aware of what the Act says about children’s rights, only 54 per cent of unaided school teachers knew about this. Further, only 45 per cent of aided school teachers and 52 per cent of unaided schoolteachers were aware of the school’s duties and responsibilities. The Hindu New Delhi, Wednesday, 25 July 2012 wrote “Even as enrolment in schools remain high, statistics

concerning disadvantaged children dip with not much time left for the full roll-out in the implementation of the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education (RTE) Act, 2009, weaker sections and minorities continue to be at a disadvantage”. The latest DISE figures suggest that the number of children enrolled in government primary schools has dropped by 21 lakh between 2009-10 and 2010-11, while there has been an increase of 11 lakh in enrolment in private schools. One glaring lacunae in schooling efforts continues to be in respect of ‘Children with Special Needs’; only 5.02 lakh of whom are enrolled, which constitutes a meagre 0.26 per cent of the total enrolment and what is more, according to DISE, only half of the 1.5 million elementary schools have provided barrier free access through ramps for these children. “Having ramps does not make a school accessible by itself, as it does not help a child with hearing and visual impairment. The HRD ministry officials need to sit together to make all schools barrier-free for all kinds of disabilities and special needs”, says Javed Abidi, convenor of Disabled Rights Group.

The objectives of the study were to:

- Find out the status of implementation of various provisions of RTE Act, 2009 in States and UTs.
- Study the steps taken for age-appropriate admission of out of school disadvantaged children.

- Find out if teaching learning materials have been prepared for children admitted under age appropriate admission.
 - Assess the awareness level of stakeholders in states and UTs to implement RTE Act, 2009.
 - Find out concerns and challenges of states and UTs for effective implementation of RTE Act, 2009 for disadvantaged children.
 - Find out strategic plans of action prepared by states/UTs for providing free and compulsory Elementary Education to implement RTE to children of SC/ST/weaker sections, and children with various disabilities.
 - Find out specific steps taken by states/UTs to inspire parents and community to admit these children into schools.
 - Find out arrangements being made for providing free pre-school education to these children below 6 year of age.
- 2009 for disadvantaged and disabled (challenged) children.
- Phase II:** The following tools were developed for the study:
- A Questionnaire for Preliminary Information about Implementation of RTE Act, 2009
 - Interview Schedule for Functionaries
 - Interview Schedule for Head teachers/Teachers
 - Interview Schedule for Disadvantaged Students
 - Interview Schedule for Students with Disabilities
 - Interview Schedule for Parents of Disadvantaged and Disabled Children
 - Observation Checklist
 - School Information Sheet

METHOD

Based on the objectives of the study, normative survey, followed by in-depth study, was most appropriate design. The study was conducted in two phases:

Phase I: in this phase, Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009 (RTE) was studied. Based on provisions of the Act, a questionnaire was developed and sent to states/ UTs to seek preliminary information on the status of implementation of RTE Act,

A questionnaire was designed to collect preliminary information about steps taken for implementation of RTE for disadvantaged and disabled children in states/UTs. Questionnaire items sought information on strategic plan of action prepared to implement RTE in states/UTs for providing free and compulsory elementary education to children (SC/ST/BPL/children with disabilities); specific steps taken to inspire parents and community to admit children into neighbourhood schools; arrangements made for providing free pre-school education to disadvantaged and children with disabilities below six years of age; major initiatives and interventions taken since inception of RTE, especially for children with special needs; and other steps taken to

ensure RTE for disadvantaged and children with disabilities.

The interview schedule for functionaries had six open-ended items that sought in-depth information about:

- Specific steps taken for SC/ST/BPL students and children with disabilities.
- Specific steps taken for non-enrolled and dropout children with disabilities.
- Various facilities available for children with disabilities.
- Arrangements for special teachers, educational materials and infrastructure modifications.
- Future plans for additional facilities to children with disabilities.
- Arrangements for pre-school education of children with disabilities.

The interview schedule for head teachers/teachers inquired about:

- Information about disadvantaged children during the orientation of RTE.
- Provisions and facilities for disadvantaged children in the school.
- Steps taken for age appropriate admission of disadvantaged children.
- Steps taken for the training of non-enrolled and dropout children for age appropriate placement in different classes.
- Assessment procedures being used for evaluation of children's progress.

- Steps taken to provide supplementary instructions to educationally weak children.
- Cooperation from parents of disadvantaged children.
- Constraints and challenges in the implementation of RTE for these children.
- Suggestions for proper implementation of RTE for these children.
- Information about children with disabilities in the orientation of RTE.
- Special provisions/ facilities for children with disabilities in the school.
- Steps taken for special teacher, educational materials and infrastructural modification.
- Steps taken for age appropriate admission of children with disabilities into different classes.
- Assessment procedures being used for different categories of children with disabilities.
- Cooperation from the parents of children with disabilities.
- Difficulties encountered in teaching different categories of children with disabilities.
- Constraints and challenges in the implementation of RTE to children with disabilities.
- Suggestions for proper implementation of RTE to these children.

The interview schedule for disadvantaged students was designed to collect information if they were receiving various educational facilities

and positive social environment in the school. Items sought information from students was related to:

- Educational materials received from school free of cost.
- Regularity in attending the school. If not regular, reasons for being absent.
- Training or help received from school if admitted under age appropriate admission.
- Additional academic help from teachers.
- Behaviour of teachers and classmates towards them.

The interview schedule for students with disabilities sought information about:

- Specific educational materials received from school free of cost.
- Difficulties faced in coming to the school.
- Difficulties encountered in moving in and around the school.
- Aids and appliances received.
- Training received for the use of aids and appliances.
- Additional help from teachers.
- Special training received if admitted under age appropriate admission.
- Behaviour of teachers and classmates towards them.

The interview schedule for parents of disadvantaged and disabled children inquired about:

- Difficulties faced in the admission of child.
- Information about RTE Act, 2009.
- Special facilities provided to the child in the school.

- Additional help to the child in the school.
- Kind of special training to the child, if enrolled late.
- Problems faced by the child in the school.
- Last PTA meeting attended and its outcomes.
- Suggestions for improvement of education.

The purpose of observation checklist was to verify existing facilities and safety measures in the school. The items related to:

- Number of teachers.
- Number of students.
- Number of various categories of children.
- Teacher-pupil ratio.
- Infrastructural modification and safety measures for children.
- Availability of educational materials for different categories of children with disabilities.

School Information Sheet was developed to obtain elaborate information about:

- Infrastructure, such as number of rooms, separate toilets for boys and girls, disabled friendly toilets, ramps with railings, safe drinking water, safety precautions for children, playground etc.
- Number of teachers.
- Number of students.
- Category-wise number of children (SC, ST, various categories of children with disabilities).
- Number of boys and girls in each category.
- Teacher-pupil ratio.

Purposive sampling was used in selection of districts with high population of SC/ST/BPL/children with disabilities. Schools from rural and urban areas with high population of SC/ST/BPL/children with disabilities were also selected through purposive sampling. However, stratified random sampling was used in the selection of respondents in each category. Since the study was of in-depth nature, responses of respondents to each item were

categorised, and simple descriptive method was used in describing the results. The same method was used for responses of all instruments used in the study.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Two districts (Thiruvananthapuram and Kollam) were selected for in-depth study based on high population of ST/SC/BPL and children with disabilities. The following table shows samples of the study in both the districts:

Table 1
Respondents (Samples) in Thiruvananthapuram and Kollam districts

Respondents	Thiruvananthapuram			Kollam		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
Functionaries	01	00	01	01	00	01
Head Teachers/Teachers	02	04	06	05	03	08
SC/ST Students	04	01	05	05	06	11
Children with Disabilities	03	03	06	07	03	10
Guardians	03	05	08	03	07	10
Total	13	13	26	21	19	40

Table 2
Area-wise sample schools and respondents in two districts

	Thiruvananthapuram			Kollam		
	Rural	Urban	Total	Rural	Urban	Total
Schools	02	02	04	04	01	05
Head Teachers/Teachers	04	02	06	06	02	08
SC/ST Children	02	03	05	08	03	11
Children with Disabilities	03	03	06	08	02	10
Guardians	04	04	08	08	02	10

The table clearly shows that there were an equal numbers of females and males (13 each) in Thiruvananthapuram district; while there were 21 males and 19 females in Kollam district. The number of female respondents in each group differed (except for functionaries), though the total number of males was more than the total number of females in the sample.

Only two functionaries – one in Thiruvananthapuram district and Kollam district – could be interviewed. They were asked about the steps taken by the state for SC/ST/BPL/ various categories of disabled children in the light of Right to Education Act, 2009. The functionary in Thiruvananthapuram had joined his duties recently and was not clear about steps taken. He told that all children were being brought to schools for their education with the help of their parents. The functionary in Kollam district claimed that he himself conducts monitoring work and ensures facilities to children in accordance with their needs. ‘Sahavasa’ programme is conducted in each block for SC/ST children for personality development and coaching is provided in the subjects in accordance with their needs. Teachers and parents participate in this programme in order to provide coaching. The facilities, *e.g.*, free textbooks, uniform, scholarship are given to these children. ‘Sahavasa’ programme is conducted in Panchayat Bhawan where children from their

respective homes come for various activities. School Management Committees (SMCs) also discuss about various facilities to be provided to SC/ST children. The functionary in Thiruvananthapuram told that Below Poverty Line (BPL) children had been provided textbooks, uniform and school bags. The functionary in Kollam informed that ‘*Padhnavedu*’ programme was going on for Below Poverty Line (BPL) and Above Poverty Line (APL) children. ‘*Padhana Vedu*’ programme is coaching classes that are organised everyday from 5:30 p.m. to 7:30 p.m. Teacher provides coaching to children in the subject areas where these children are weak. One centre in each Panchayat has been opened to run this programme and there are 30 centres in Kollam district. Parents and villagers fully support this programme.

The DPO of Kollam told that spectacles and large print picture charts were provided to children with low vision. Since children with total loss of vision were not found in the survey conducted by the DPO office in Kollam, Braille books were not supplied to schools. Hearing-impaired children were provided hearing aids after assessments. These hearing aids were prescribed by the audiologists. The DPOs in Thiruvananthapuram and Kollam informed that disabled-friendly toilets and ramps with railing had been constructed in all schools to facilitate easy access to wheelchair users (children with locomotors disabilities). When deficiencies in

construction of ramps were pointed out, the DPOs said that they would incorporate necessary changes in the ramps. The DPO of Kollam also told that wheelchairs, walking sticks as per need are being provided to children with locomotors disabilities after assessment. Scholarships are given and suitable furniture for seating children with locomotors disabilities are also provided in the classrooms. There is a provision of Rs. 5000.00 per child per year for corrective surgery for children with disabilities.

DPOs in both the districts informed that home-based education is given to children with mental disability and children with multiple disabilities. The DPO in Kollam also told that parent counselling is done to train them in handling these children. In twelve Block Resource Centres (BRCs), 132 resource teachers had been appointed to help children with disabilities in their education. Education volunteers had been appointed to visit children with multiple-disabilities at home and provide counselling and basic lessons in language and arithmetic.

Another item for functionaries was concerned with steps about non-enrolled and dropout special needs children's admission and training for age-appropriate placement in different classes. DPOs of Thiruvananthapuram and Kollam reported that they did not find any non-enrolled and dropout special needs children during their survey.

The functionaries were requested to tell about various facilities available to different categories of children with disabilities. The DPO in Thiruvananthapuram told that educational material for visually impaired children was available at BRC, but it was not fully accessible to these children. The DPO in Kollam, however, told that these children were being seated in front rows, and spectacles, large print picture cards and chart boards were provided to them. In Thiruvananthapuram district, children with hearing impairments were assess for hearing loss and suitable hearing aids were provided. Speech therapy was provided to these children for improvements in language. In Kollam district, these children were seated in the front row in the classroom and teacher paid individual attention to them. She used various teaching strategies and modified them in accordance with the specific needs of these children.

DPOs in both the districts said that wheelchairs, walking sticks (crutches) and callipers were provided to children with locomotors disabilities as per their needs. Ramps with railings and disabled friendly toilets had been constructed in schools. Inclusive Education Centre (IEC) provides physiotherapy to children with locomotors disabilities and all necessary equipment for this purpose is available in such centres. There is a provision of Rs. 5000.00 per child per year for corrective surgery. The

provisions for home-based education for mentally challenged and children with multiple-disabilities were available in both the districts, but parent counselling was a special feature for such children in Kollam district.

The functionaries were requested to tell about the steps taken for special teachers, educational materials, and infrastructural modifications to meet varying needs of disabled children. Both the DPOs told that resource teachers had been appointed to help children with disabilities in their education, and training of these teachers is organised at state level. Adapted educational materials, such as adapted textbooks, educational toys, picture charts are available in BRCs. The DPO of Kollam added that these items are supplied to schools as per the subject and needs of children. Both the DPOs claimed that infrastructural modifications, such as construction of ramps with railings, disabled friendly toilets had been done.

When asked about the future strategy of state to implement inclusive education, they said that all defective ramps would be reconstructed as per specifications. Special sitting furniture for CP children and others would be arranged, and classrooms would be made disabled friendly. Groups consisting of general teachers, parents of children with disabilities and resource teachers are formed to share and discuss their problems and find solutions. BRCs carry out

monitoring work and provide on-site support to teachers.

The functionaries were asked about the arrangement of pre-school education for children, including children with disabilities. The functionaries informed that government is planning to start pre-primary section with every primary school. *Anganwadi* centres are already there, but parents of children with disabilities do not send them to these centres.

Head teachers/teachers were asked if they had been told about Scheduled Caste (SC), Scheduled Tribe (ST), Below Poverty Line (BPL) children in the orientation programme for Right to Education Act (RTE), 2009. All fourteen respondents (6 in Thiruvananthapuram and 8 in Kollam) told that general instruction like no discrimination, age-appropriate admission were given; but no specific instruction were given about SC/ST/BPL children. The second item in the interview schedule for head teachers/teachers inquired about special provisions for different categories of children. All respondents in Thiruvananthapuram and Kollam informed that SC/ST/BPL children receive scholarship (Rs. 250 per year from Classes I-IV and Rs. 700 per year from Classes V-VIII). Free textbooks and free uniform are provided to all children (general, SC/ST/BPL). They also informed that educationally weak SC/ST/BPL children receive free coaching everyday either before the school starts or after school hours.

Head teachers/teachers were asked about the steps taken for non-enrolled, dropout and age-appropriate admission belonging to above categories and their training for placement in different classes. Since all children come for admission at the prescribed age, there is no problem of non-enrolled, dropout and age-appropriate admission and their training for placement in different classes, said 13 respondents.

When inquired about assessment procedures used for educational evaluation of children, all respondents in both the districts said that they maintain individual profile of daily activities of children in the school for which marks are given, and these marks are converted into grades. Children are also given monthly, half-yearly and annual tests and marks are awarded. These marks are later converted into grade. Head teachers and teachers were asked to tell about the steps they take for providing supplementary instruction to educationally weak children. All respondents in both the districts informed that extra classes are organised to impart instruction to educationally weak children either before the school starts or after the classes are over. One head teacher added that SSA appoints additional teacher to provide instruction in extra classes, and monthly salary of Rs 750 is paid.

The head teachers/teachers were asked if they face difficulties in seeking cooperation from the

parents of children of various categories; except four respondents in Thiruvananthapuram, all head teachers and teachers in both the districts reported of receiving full cooperation from parents of children. Four respondents, who told of not receiving cooperation from parents, explained that these parents belong to BPL category and they do not pay attention to the education of their children.

The respondents were asked to narrate constraint and challenges, if any, in the implementation of RTE, 2009. Out of fourteen respondents in both the districts, one head teacher in Thiruvananthapuram said that, 'there are constraint and challenges in the implementation of RTE in the real sense. The pupil-teacher ratio is 1:50, which is not as per RTE norms. There are no supporting staffs for library and Lab, and one staff was appointed by Parent-Teacher Association (PTA) to look after library at monthly salary of Rs 2000. Mid-day meal also consumes a lot of time, because head teacher and teacher have to go to store to collect grain and complete all formalities. He further added that children of migrant labourers from Hindi speaking states, Gujarat, Kanada and Assam come for admission and leave school because of inadequate arrangements for age-appropriate training for placement in different classes.'

Head teachers and teachers were requested to give suggestions for proper

implementation of RTE, 2009. One head teacher in Thiruvananthapuram said that recurrent training programmes should be conducted in the area of RTE, so that teachers are made fully aware of various provisions of RTE. One respondent in Thiruvananthapuram and four respondents in Kollam maintained that awareness campaigns for parents and society should be conducted to create awareness for RTE. Two respondents in Thiruvananthapuram and three respondents in Kollam said that scholarship amount to children from Classes I-VIII should be enhanced to Rs. 5000 per year, while one teacher in Kollam stressed that children should receive scholarship amount monthly, not at the end of the year. One respondent in Thiruvananthapuram and two respondents in Kollam told that transport arrangements should be made to bring children to school and drop them back home, particularly for those who come from a far-flung areas.

The head teachers/teachers were asked if the respondents had received any orientation about RTE for children with disabilities. One respondent in Thiruvananthapuram and four respondents in Kollam informed of receiving general orientation about children with disabilities during the orientation of RTE. However, a majority of respondents (05 in Thiruvananthapuram and 04 in Kollam) denied having received any information about RTE to children

with disabilities during the orientation for RTE.

When inquired about provisions/facilities in the school for children with disabilities, all respondents in both the districts told that ramps with railings and disabled friendly toilets were available at school level. Children with disabilities receive aids and appliances as per their needs. BRC provides special educational materials, and special teachers visit schools once a week to provide guidance to these children.

Head teachers/teachers were asked to tell about the steps taken for special teachers, educational materials, infrastructure, etc to meet varying needs of different categories of children with disabilities. Almost all respondents told that a special teacher visits the school once or twice a week, which is inadequate. Daily visit of a special teacher to every school should be ensured so that children with disabilities could benefit in improving their learning. Further, special teachers have specialisation in one disability, while they deal with all types of disabilities. It is difficult to understand how much justice they may be doing to children with other disabilities when they have no expertise in different disabilities. As far as educational materials are concerned, special teachers bring such materials with them and take it back with them. If teachers take special materials back with them, how children with disabilities will learn? In most of the

schools, ramps with railings were not made as per specification making it extremely difficult for wheelchair users to use them. One head teacher in Thiruvananthapuram and one head teacher in Kollam districts claimed that their schools had special furniture to meet specific seating needs of Cerebral Palsy (CP) children.

The respondents were asked about the steps taken for age-appropriate admission of children with disabilities. All respondents in both the districts said that they did not have problem of over-age children coming for admission. The head teachers/teachers were asked to tell about assessment procedures they use for different categories of children with disabilities. A majority of respondents claimed that CCE was being used in the assessment of children with disabilities. In case of children with low vision, teachers used oral assessment procedures. A minority of respondents, however, told that assessment of children with disabilities was being done by the special teachers. One teacher in Kollam district informed of assessing mentally challenged children through picture charts and toys.

When asked about cooperation of parents of children with disabilities with school, all respondents gave affirmative answer. The teachers were asked about difficulties that they encounter in teaching different categories of children with disabilities. Virtually, all respondents in both the districts said that they encountered

difficulties in teaching different categories of children with disabilities. They said that behaviour problem of children with mental disabilities (challenges) makes it difficult to manage classroom teaching. These teachers do not have any special training and they find themselves helpless in dealing with children with mental challenges. Two of the teachers said that in a class of 50 children, it is extremely difficult to pay attention to children with mental challenge and they try to help these children by explaining them personally.

The respondents were asked about constraint and challenges in the implementation of RTE for these children and give their suggestions for the same. A majority of respondents (3/6 50 per cent in Thiruvananthapuram and 6/8 75 per cent in Kollam districts) maintained that handling children with serious mental disabilities in the classroom is a major challenge, particularly, when teachers are not trained in dealing with such children. Remaining respondents in both the districts did not have any problem in dealing with these children. It is possible that these teachers may not be teaching children with mental disability or they may not have children with disabilities in their classrooms. The following suggestions were given by the respondents for proper implementation of RTE:

- A special teacher should be appointed at school level to help children with disabilities,

said 4/6 respondents in Thiruvananthapuram and 8/8 in Kollam districts.

- One respondent in Thiruvananthapuram and two respondents in Kollam districts suggested that general teachers should be provided training in dealing with children with disabilities.
- Two respondents in Thiruvananthapuram and four respondents in Kollam districts told that relevant materials for teaching children with disabilities were not available in schools. These materials should be supplied to schools urgently.
- Three respondents in Thiruvananthapuram said that aids and appliances should be made available to schools to ensure RTE to children with disabilities.
- One respondent in Thiruvananthapuram maintained that children with mental disability should be sent to special school.
- Two of the respondents in Kollam district suggested that suitable modifications should be made in the classroom by providing appropriate furniture to children with disabilities in accordance with their specific needs.

Interviews with SC students were conducted to have first-hand information about various facilities and educational help they receive. ST students were not available in the

sample schools. Five SC students in Thiruvananthapuram district and eleven SC students in Kollam district were interviewed. The first item in the interview schedule related to various facilities, such as free textbooks, scholarship and uniform. All sixteen respondents in both the districts confirmed having received free textbooks, uniform and scholarships (Classes I-IV Rs.250, Classes V-VI Rs. 500). Four SC students in Kollam district informed that they had received teaching-learning materials, such as sketch pens, charts and markers.

Another item inquired if these students were attending schools regularly. All sixteen students in both the districts told that they attend their schools regularly except when they are sick. Out of sixteen SC students in Thiruvananthapuram and Kollam districts, thirteen students said that their teachers helped them in overcoming academic difficulties. They take extra remedial classes also to help educationally weak children. However, three students in Kollam district told that no extra classes were being organised for educationally weak children, but teachers do help children during the class teaching. SC students were asked to tell their experiences about behaviour of classmates and teachers towards them. All students in both the districts expressed full satisfaction over the behaviour of classmates and teachers.

Six children with disabilities (two low vision, two no vision and

two mentally challenged) were interviewed in Thiruvananthapuram district and ten children with disabilities [three locomotors, two cerebral Palsy (CP), one low vision, three mentally challenged and one suffering from multiple-disabilities] were interviewed in Kollam district. The help of teachers was taken in interviewing children because of language problem. Children were asked to tell what educational materials they received free of cost. All children in Thiruvananthapuram and Kollam districts received free textbooks and uniform, which are given to non-disabled children also. All six children suffering from various types of disabilities received Rs. 1100 per year under the scheme of Integrated Education for Disabled Children (IEDC). One mentally challenged child told that he had also received Rs. 500 per year from state government in addition to Rs. 1100. As far as aids and appliances and other teaching materials were concerned, special teachers brought materials with them from the resource centre and took it back with them. Children have not been provided teaching-learning materials individually despite the fact that SSA has a provision for Rs. 3000 per disabled child per year. One child with total loss of vision in Thiruvananthapuram reported of receiving Braille kit from Kerala Federation of the Blind. Two low vision children did not get large print or Braille books; but one low vision child received glasses after

assessment. In Kollam district, low vision child did not receive TLM or large print materials in accordance with her specific needs. Out of ten children with various disabilities in Kollam district, only four children (two locomotors and two mentally challenged) received TLMs. It is difficult to understand why other children were not given TLMs.

Children with disabilities were asked to tell about their difficulties in coming to the school. Some schools in Thiruvananthapuram and Kollam districts have been provided buses to bring children to schools and take them back home, while other schools did not have this facility. Some children with disabilities were being accompanied by their mothers or any other family member. Thus, there was no major problem for children with disabilities in coming to the school in both the districts. Children with disabilities were asked if they encounter problems in moving around the school. Although ramps were not made properly, children with disabilities did not experience serious problems, because they received help from people in the school in both the districts. However, most of children with disabilities remained in classrooms during recess.

The children with disabilities were asked to tell about the aids and appliances they received. It was obvious from the interviews with children suffering from total loss of vision that they did not receive individual educational aids and

appliances in Thiruvananthapuram and Kollam districts. However, some children received Braille kits from Kerala Federation of the Blind. Children suffering from locomotor disabilities received crutches, wheelchairs, calipers, etc from SSA. Children who received aids and appliances were given training in the use of these items in Block Resource Centres once a week.

Children with disabilities were asked if they were receiving additional help from teachers. All children with disabilities in Thiruvananthapuram and Kollam districts told that teachers pay special attention to them and take special care of them. Teachers seat them in the front row and provide help whenever needed. They also told that their classmates and teachers behave with them nicely. There were no cases of late admission or dropout of children with disabilities.

Interviews with parents of SC/disabled children were conducted in Thiruvananthapuram and Kollam districts to find out their awareness of RTE, various facilities to their children, additional educational help to their children and any difficulty faced by their children. Eight parents of SC /disabled children in Thiruvananthapuram district and ten parents of SC /disabled children in Kollam district were interviewed. The parents were asked if they had encountered any difficulty in the admission of their children. None of the parents in both the districts faced any difficulty in admission of

their children. Half of the parents (4/8) in Thiruvananthapuram and less than half of the parents (4/10) in Kollam had some knowledge of RTE. These parents came to know about RTE either through acquaintance or school meetings.

In response to the question what special facilities are provided to their children, all parents in Thiruvananthapuram and Kollam districts told that their children had received free textbooks, uniform and scholarship. Six of the ten parents in Kollam district told that their children with disabilities had received wheelchair, special shoes and TLMs besides free textbooks, uniform and scholarship. One parent of a child with disability in Thiruvananthapuram told that her child had received special shoes after one year of assessment resulting in acute pain in wearing these shoes. Therefore, the child could not use those shoes. When this matter was reported to the concerned authorities, she was told that assessment would be done again and new special shoes would be provided. The parents were asked if their children had received additional help from the school. Except three parents in both the districts, all other reported of receiving help from schools. The help was in the form of extra coaching to educationally weak children and special attention to children with disabilities. However, out of these three parents, the child of one parent in Thiruvananthapuram did not receive any aids and

appliances, while child of one parent in Kollam was receiving home-based education. One SC parent in Kollam reported of no additional help from the school. When asked about problems faced by their children, no problems were reported. They said that other children help the disabled children taking them to toilet. The parents were asked to tell if they participate in the PTA meetings of the schools and give suggestions for improvements, all parents in both the districts informed of participating in various meetings of school. They said that educational progress and health issues of children are discussed in meetings. Parents gave the following suggestions:

- Three parents wanted scholarship amount to be enhanced.
- Two in Thiruvananthapuram district and eight parents in Kollam district demanded that trained special teachers should be appointed in every school.
- Two parents in Thiruvananthapuram and one in Kollam districts maintained that aids and appliances in accordance with specific needs of children with disabilities should be provided. One parent in Thiruvananthapuram demanded that escort facility should be provided to needy children with disabilities.
- Two parents in Thiruvananthapuram district demanded that regular medical checkups should be organised for children with disabilities.

Table 3
Facilities in schools

Items	Thiruvananthapuram			Kollam		
	Available in schools	Not available in schools	Total schools	Available in schools	Not available in schools	Total schools
Safe drinking water	04	00	04	05	00	05
Separate toilets for boys and girls	04	00	04	05	00	05
Disabled friendly toilets	03	01	04	04	01	05
Ramps with railings	04*	00	04	05*	00	05
Railing/other safety measures (railings on stairs, boundary walls) in the building	02	02*	04	03	02*	05
Playground	02	02	04	02	03	05
Approach road to the school for wheelchairs	00	04*	04	04	01	05

- Two parents in Thiruvananthapuram and one parent in Kollam districts wanted transport facilities to bring their children to schools and back. These parents were from the schools where transport facilities were not available.
- Suitable infrastructural changes in school buildings should be made to ensure accessibility and safety of children with disabilities. Furniture, including special furniture in accordance with needs of children with disabilities should be provided, said two parents in Thiruvananthapuram and one in Kollam districts.

The facilities in schools have been shown in Table 3.

Safe drinking water and separate toilets for boys and girls were available in all sample schools of Thiruvananthapuram and Kollam districts. Disabled friendly toilets were available in three out of four sample schools in Thiruvananthapuram district and four out of five sample schools in Kollam district. Although ramps for wheelchairs were available in almost all sample schools of both the districts, none of them was constructed as per specifications making it extremely difficult for wheelchair users to use them. The photographs of ramps are shown here.

Two out of four sample schools in Thiruvananthapuram and in three out of five sample schools in Kollam districts had safety measures, such as railings on staircase, balcony

and veranda. Playgrounds were not available in two of the sample schools



in Thiruvananthapuram district and three of the sample schools in Kollam district. As far as suitable approach

roads to schools for wheelchair users were concerned, only four sample schools in Kollam district had this facility.

SPOTLIGHT

- **Orientation for RTE did not include information about disadvantaged and children with disabilities.**
- **The pupil-teacher ratio is 1:50, which is not as per RTE norms.**
- **Mid-day meal consumes a lot of time because head teacher and teacher have to go to store to collect grain and complete all formalities.**
- **Children of migrant labourers from Hindi speaking states, Gujarat, Karnataka and Assam leave school because of inadequate arrangements for age-appropriate training for placement in different classes.**
- **Weekly visit by a special teacher to children with disabilities is insufficient to ensure proper learning.**
- **Teachers experience difficulties in teaching different categories of children with disabilities.**
- **Teachers have not been trained in the area of disabilities.**
- **Children with disabilities, especially visually impaired, have not been provided teaching-learning materials individually.**
- **In conclusion, one can say that there is a partial implementation of RTE Act, 2009 for children with disabilities in Kerala.**

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