

Issues of Inclusive Education in Manipur

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Abstract

Inclusive education is a comparatively new concept. The educational practice entails integration of Children With Special Needs (CWSN) in regular classrooms. The philosophy rests on the idea that every individual, regardless of one's socioeconomic and religious backgrounds, and physical and mental abilities has the right to be provided education along with everybody else. It is, therefore, about building a society with equal opportunities and social cohesion. The study aims to find out issues challenging inclusive education, as regards to disabled students, in schools located in Manipur's Imphal East and West districts. A survey was conducted by administering a self-made questionnaire in schools, where CWSN are enrolled. It was found that there are many issues that adversely affect the inclusion of CWSN in regular schools. The findings revealed that none of the schools have trained teachers and resource persons, or prepare Individualised Education Plans for CWSN. The results also revealed low assessment and high dropout rate among CWSN.

INTRODUCTION

One of the major problems that our country is facing today is the increasing number of Children with Special Needs (CWSN) being excluded from meaningful partnership in socioeconomic, political and cultural life. 'Inclusive education' can be

seen as a step to build an 'inclusive society' with equal opportunities and social cohesion for everyone, including CWSN. Increasing public awareness and advanced legislations in most parts of the world have made way for incorporating provisions as regards to the education of CWSN. It is a comparatively new concept

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that has gained momentum since the late-twentieth century. Inclusive education is an educational practice, wherein, the CWSN are integrated into regular classrooms. In inclusive education, all students, regardless of their physical and mental challenges, and socioeconomic, religious, cultural and linguistic backgrounds, are welcomed by neighbourhood schools in age-appropriate regular classes and encouraged to learn, contribute and participate in all aspects of school life. The philosophy of inclusion ensures accessible quality education for all students by effectively meeting their diverse needs in a way that is responsive, accepting, respectful and supportive. The students participate in the education programme in a 'common learning environment' aiming to eliminate barriers that may lead to exclusion. 'Common learning environment' refers to an educational setup, where students from different backgrounds and with diverse abilities learn together. It includes classrooms, libraries, cafeterias, playgrounds and toilets.

Inclusive education, therefore, is the most effective way to give all children a fair chance to go to school, learn and develop skills they need to flourish. It allows students from all backgrounds to learn and grow in the company of each other in order to ensure the benefit of all. Some of the characteristics that inclusive education meets are as follows.

- It enables each student to participate in the learning

process that is designed for all and shared with peers in a chosen educational setup.

- It provides an environment to promote a sense of belongingness among students and ensure student progress towards personal, social, emotional and academic goals.
- It rejects the use of special schools or classrooms, popular among large multi service providers, to separate CWSN from those without any disability.

RATIONALE OF THE STUDY

CWSN are often overlooked in policy making, limiting their access to education and ability to participate in social, economic and political life. These children are among the most likely to be out of school. They face persistent barriers to education, stemming from discrimination, stigma and routine failure of decision makers to incorporate disability in school services. Such children are often denied a chance to participate in community and decision making activities affecting them. Like everybody else, they, too, have ambitions and dreams, for which they need quality education to develop their skills and realise their full potential. The integration of such children in a regular educational setup has become a concern for educators, governments and society, at large.

Several initiatives have been undertaken to address the diverse

needs of such children. The focus of the Right to Education (RTE) Act 2009 is to reach out to CWSN, who are out of school, and developing a strategy that would ensure that every such child receives unhindered educational support. However, there are various factors that affect inclusive education, such as questionable attitude of people towards CWSN (in general), lack of infrastructure and resources, etc.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The study aims to find out issues adversely affecting inclusive education in the schools located in Imphal East and West districts of Manipur, where CWSN are enrolled.

METHODOLOGY

Description of the study area

According to the Zonal Education Office records 2017, there are 677 CWSN schools in Imphal East and West districts. The study was conducted in 40 CWSN facilitated schools of the districts, of which 10 were found of admitting disabled children. Imphal East and West are the most populous areas of the State. The maximum number of CWSN was enrolled in neighbourhood and nearby schools in these districts.

Sampling procedure and data collection

Both primary and secondary sources were used in the study and qualitative

data were collected by administering a self-made questionnaire through conventional survey method. The sample was selected out of the 40 CWSN facilitated from schools located in Imphal East and West districts. Out of the 40 schools surveyed, only 10 were found of admitting CWSN in regular classrooms, where only 26 such children studied.

LIMITATION OF THE STUDY

The study covers only Imphal East and West districts of Manipur. It excludes the remaining districts due to limitation in resources.

FINDINGS

The 10 schools in Imphal East and West districts that enroll CWSN are Bashikhong High School (Imphal East), Irilbung High School (Imphal East), Kyamgei Heibong Makhong High School (Imphal East), Panthoibi High School, Bashikhong (Imphal East), Lairenjam Primary School (Imphal West), Mekola Junior High School (Imphal West), Khurai Sajor Leikai High School (Imphal East), Lairenjam Government Junior High School (Imphal West), Ningombam Junior High School (Imphal West) and Keirao Social Primary School (Imphal East).

It was found that only 26 CWSN (14 boys and 12 girls) were enrolled in these 10 schools. These children have various disabilities. Of the 14 boys, eight were mentally retarded, one was visually impaired, two had hearing impairment, one physically

handicapped and two had multiple disabilities. Of the 12 girls, nine were mentally retarded, two were physically handicapped and only one had multiple disabilities.

It was further found that on the days of school, all CWSN were present. All schools provide simple assistive devices like wheelchair, hearing aids and walking stick to CWSN with the help of the respective Zonal Education Offices. The study further revealed that most CWSN learned and performed better when exposed to general education system. Hence, children perform better academically when in inclusive settings.

Moreover, inclusion provides an opportunity to CWSN and children without any disability to mingle with each other and build relationships and develop social skills. Besides, an inclusive classroom setup inculcates human values and compassion in children without any disability and makes them accept CWSN as part of the society. However, the study found out many issues that adversely affected the inclusion of CWSN in mainstream classrooms. Some of the major issues are as follows.

- Lack of access to CWSN in mainstream education
- Lack of trained teachers and resource persons
- Lack of Individualised Education Plans
- Lack of appropriate curriculum and teaching-learning material
- Lack of infrastructure

Lack of access to mainstream education

At present, only few CWSN have access to education in regular schools. The study found that many CWSN dropped out of school. It may be because many schools did not show willingness to cater to the 'needs' of such children. Besides, parents of many such children were not aware of government provisions as regards to their education. Apart from these, lack of encouraging attitude and sensitivity on part of teachers, classmates, parents and community make these children experience discrimination. Hence, they feel discouraged and inferior to others. They drop out of schools as they feel uncomfortable and unwelcome.

Lack of trained teachers and resource persons

The study found that many teachers lack the competence and desire to modify teaching methodology as per the needs of CWSN. Teachers teaching children without disability are engaged in dealing with CWSN. It was found that not a single teacher was trained in teaching special students. Besides, no resource person was employed to cater to CWSN in the schools. As a result, it was difficult for teachers and other students to understand the needs of CWSN and keep them motivated.

Lack of Individualised Education Plans

The main reason behind the lack of Individualised Education Plans was

the large class size. Normally, 30 to 50 students study in a class, which makes paying attention to each child, i.e., paying individualised attention, difficult. The teachers found it all the more difficult while catering to CWSN. This led to treating CWSN at par with those without disabilities. No special care was given to such children in the schools.

Lack of appropriate curriculum and teaching-learning material

The curriculum being followed in the schools lack flexibility and do not offer an environment where CWSN can showcase and polish their abilities. The teaching-learning material was also not appropriate for CWSN. No special teaching-learning material like Braille was found to be used in the schools. Hence, the present teaching-learning environment hardly provides any scope for the education and all-round development of CWSN.

Lack of infrastructure

All surveyed schools had a ramp. But they did not have adequate and appropriate infrastructure for CWSN. Till the time the survey was conducted, the schools did not take any initiative to ensure appropriate infrastructure for CWSN enrolled there.

CONCLUSION

Many efforts are being made to include children with disabilities in mainstream education. In order to achieve the goal of inclusive education, the first step would be to devise and implement action plans to incorporate CWSN in regular schools.

As a regular classroom consists of students from diverse backgrounds, it is time that teachers realise the importance of accepting each student as unique.

Inclusive education is a way to educate all children, irrespective of their abilities. Moreover, it helps students studying with CWSN become aware of their needs and develops compassion in them. The study further found that lack of access to CWSN in regular schools, trained teachers, resource persons, individualised education plans, appropriate curriculum, teaching-learning material and appropriate infrastructure act as barriers in achieving the goal of inclusive education. Therefore, governments, educators, policy makers and society at large need to take effective steps to improve the condition of CWSN and achieve the goal of inclusive education.

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