

# Inclusive education: the educational opportunities and challenges of children with special needs, in jammu and Kashmir.

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**Abstract:** Education is Fundamental for the development of individuals, nations and societies. It helps in achieving full human potential, promoting national development and developing an equitable and just society. In india education is a fundamental right for all children. From time to time India enacted many acts, framed many policies and launched several programmes to educate all children. But still a large chunk of children especially children with special needs (CWSN) could not find it an easy walk and were left behind. To mainstream them on par with the normal population the government of India started a centrally sponsored scheme integrated Education for Disabled Children(IEDC) and sarva shiksha abhyan to provide educational opportunities for children with special needs(CWSN) up to the age of 14. Then further extended to four more years by launching Inclusive Education for Disabled at Secondary Stage (IEDSS) through Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan (RMSA) . Sarva Shiksha Abhiyanand RMSA, now Samagra Shiksha is one of the programmes implemented to create barrier free environment in the school and to promote inclusive education for the children with special needs (CWSN) as one of the components. Most of the schools in Jammu and Kashmir are inaccessible, with no disabled friendly toilets, defective ramps and railings. Manpower to meet the diverse needs of CWSN is also least. Most of the parents are least concerned about the education of their disabled children. The present study was focused on the educational opportunities of children with special needs in jammu and Kashmir of the Indian union. The study covered a sample( random sampling) of CWSNs (500), teachers (100), parents (130), heads of the schools (30) to collect the facts regarding the accessibility, barrier free environment, retention of CWSN, challenges faced by teachers , parents and children with social needs (CWSN).

Keywords: disability, children with special needs, inclusion, Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, Barrier free environment.

## Introduction:

Education is the means to achieve social justice and equality and inclusive education is critical in achieving an inclusive society in which every citizen has the opportunity to dream big , to strive and to contribute. Hence the government bust aim to benefit all children in terms of opportunities so that not a single child be deprived on any basis from the fundamental right of education. Government of india took several steps to that end and enacted many many laws, made amendments ,devise educational policies and launched many schemes and programmes to main stream marginalised children especially children with special needs. The state of jammu and Kashmiralso followed the footprints of the centre and implemented them in the state to subject and address the inclusive challenges of the state.

The 86th constitution amendment inserted a new Article 21A which made Education a Fundamental Rights in the age of 6-14 years. This has given a new thrust to children with special needs. Article 21A States that the State shall provide free and compulsory education to all children of the age 6-14 years in such manner as the state may by law determine with the historic Right to free and compulsory education. Bill becoming and law, the National Commission for protection of children rights (NCPCR) has been designated as the monitoring authority for the RTE Act. While MHRD is the key implementing agency for the entitlements under the RTE, the NCPCR has been assigned the mandate to review and asses the implementation of safe guards and rights of children in embedded in the RTE. Persons with disabilities act (PWD-1995) has several provisions to ensure equal opportunities, protection of rights and full participation of differently abled children in society, education etc. The Government has been entrusted to provide quality education /vocational education etc and to ensure free and compulsory education in an appropriate environment till the age of 18, to Encourage inclusion in regular schools , Free of cost special books and equipments, uniform, scholarship and grants etc , Removal of architectural barriers in educational and training institutions. . National Trust Act 1999 for the welfare of persons with developmental disabilities such as Autism, Cerebral Palsy, Mentally Retarded and Multiple Disabilities. UNCRPD:- United Nations Convention for Rights of People with Disabilities evolving capacity of people with disabilities.

Sarva shiksha abhyan(SSA) , The Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan (RMSA) and now the samagra shiksha has the intervention for inclusive education like identification, financial and formal assistance, appropriate placement, preparation of individualized educational plan, provision of aids and appliances, teacher training, resource support, removal of architectural barriers to create barrier free environment in the schools and zero rejection policy from primary to secondary level.

Despite of the above mentioned policies and rights ,children with special needs face lot of difficulties and challenges in terms of accessibility , retention, quality education, availability of appropriate learning material ,attitude and parental preferences etc. keeping in view the geographical locations of the schools in jammu and Kashmir, 90% of rural schools are in accessible for children with physical disabilities like cerebral palsy, muscular dystrophy, multiple disability and loco- motor disability. Urban schools too have lot of structural barriers like non availability of ramps, Disabled friendly toilets, appropriate learning material, etc. the Union territory has only 2% of teachers who received special training programs meant for inclusive education, only 27 resource persons for inclusive education and 54 special education teachers in government sector who too are on contractual basis.

### **Related Literature**

The studies conducted in the area by various researchers such as Sahoo (1991), Mandravalli (1991), Kapoor (1990), Petrie and Poland (1998) , Sharma (1989), Davis and Watson (2001), Verma, (2002; 2004), Julka (2005a; 2005b), Soni (2003; 2005a; 2005b), Singh (2004), Seetharam (2005), Chudasama et al. (2006), Venkatesh (2006),AK Gupta(2011) ,firdous Malik(2019, 2020),Mohmad Iqbal Dar (2020),Fasil ahmad Mir and Priya Darshani Gupta(2020), Muzamil Jan (2020)have done some sort of work on various changes of CWSN.But still a lot is to be done in the field of research word to develop a good body of knowledge on inclusive education in india in general and jammu and Kashmir in particular.

Very few research studies have been conducted so far in the UT of Jammu and Kashmir in the field of inclusive education. The challenges in the implementation of inclusive approach to mainstream children with special needs and to orient teachers and parents have not given adequate attention. Hence, the present study was taken up to develop further insight of knowledge in this direction with the following objectives.

### Objectives:

- (i) To identify the profile of the CWSN attending the schools;
- (ii) To study the accessibility of CWSN in government and government recognized schools, and initiatives taken by government to create barrier free environment.
- (iii) To study the measures for utilization of trained professionals in the schools for the inclusion of CWSN
- (iv) To identify the interventions of Education department in inclusive education policy in the school;
- (v) To assess the problems of the teachers in creating barrier free environment for inclusion of the CWSN;
- (vi) To study the awareness of the parents of the CWSN about the measures taken by the teachers in creating barrier free environment;
- (vii) To identify the classroom management of CWSN in government schools
- (viii) To suggest suitable strategies for creating barrier free environment in the schools as perceived by the parents and teachers.

### Research questions:

With the above objectives in consideration the following research questions were framed:

1. What are the various categories of CWSN attending Schools in terms of disability, Number and type of schooling, of the Children with Special needs?
2. What are the measures taken to make schooling accessible for children with special needs?
3. What is the current main power of professionals in the inclusive policy of school education in the state?
4. What are the interventions introduced by education department in promoting inclusive policy in education in schools?
5. What are the problems of the teachers in creating barrier free environment for inclusion of the CWSN?
6. How much awareness does teachers and parents have in dealing with CWSN to promote inclusive Education?
7. What are the necessary measures that need to be taken into consideration to promote inclusive education?

## Methodology:

The universe of study for the present work was jammu and Kashmir which is geographically divided into two regions. Each region has 10 districts each. For the purpose of whole study two districts from jammu region ( district jammu and district udampur) and Three districts Kashmir region( district pulwama, Srinagar and district Baramullah) were selected.

For the purpose of the present study, from each district , 30 schools having highest number of CWSN were selected. From among the CWSN in the selected schools of each district, 50 children were selected randomly as sample of the study. From each district 15 parents of selected CWSN and 20 teachers / Head teachers of the selected schools were also included in the sample size through random sampling Hence the sample selected for the study includes CWSN (250), teachers (100), parents (75). Thus the total sample comprises to 425.

## Tools and techniques for data collection:

The primary source of data collection was through interview schedule, questionnaire observation and discussion method. While the secondary source of data collection was from various government and non government organizations, periodicals, News papers, internet and commission reports. For the preparation of schedule various schedules and expert opinion were taken into consideration. Before administering the schedule in the field, the field investigators were fully oriented and a pilot study was done to incorporate necessary modifications in the schedule to confine it specifically to the objectives of the study. the secondary source of data was obtained by consulting various stakeholders of inclusive education with proper procedure.

## Findings of the study:

The data thus obtained was coded tabulated in columns and rows and decoded for the final results. The objective wise findings of the study areas;

### 1. Profile of cwsn in jammu and Kashmir:

Jammu and Kashmir has a population of about 12,26700 (census 2011)with about 3753923 child population in the age group of 5-18 years of age (47.55% Females and 52.46% males). The population of children with special needs is estimated to be 30,273(0.8%) with 14132 girls (46.7%) and 16141 boys (53.3%). Around 23629 (13319 boys and 10310 girls) are enrolled in schools. The highest incidence of cwsn are in district baramulla2,209, Buggam 2027 and anantnag 2062 while Reasi 468, samba 538, and shopian 634 have the ,lowest numbers. Most of the children are in the category of locomotr disability, intellectual disability, cerebral palsy, multiple disability and hearing impairment.

### 2. Accessibility to school education:

91.4 % of children with special needs have primary schools within 1km range 87% elementary schools are within 3km range and78% high schools and 68% higher secondary schools are within 5kms range. Despite of easy availability of schooling at doorsteps 98% schools lack other parameters of inclusive and accessible schooling. There are only 6 disabled friendly toilets per 1000 schools at the middle and higher level. Only 40% of schools (9417 out of 23112 schools) have ramps of which 87% are not according to the set standards of barrier free access or universal design. 98% ramps are without hand railings or have defective railings. 68% construction

personals lack and 71% school administration lack expertise and understanding of access standards. 97% of toilets and drinking water facilities were found barrier filled and unsafe for children with disabilities. Besides this majority of the schools were with inadequate facilities of transportation, inaccessible libraries, mid day meal locations, School entrances, inadequate illumination and ventilation and improper class room furniture especially in rural areas. The classroom transactions were also barrier filled due to poor pupil teacher ratio (PTR), lack of trained teaching staff, (especially for blind, hearing impaired, intellectually impaired and autistic children with special needs), lack of audio-visual aids, Braille kits, Braille books, assessing tools, MR kits etc.

### 3. Interventions introduced by the department of education for inclusion of CWSN:

Door to door surveys after every five years for identification of CWSN, assessment and distribution of aids and appliances annually with exception from last two years with Alimco (78% parents, 68% Resource persons, 40% teachers are not satisfied with Alimco products, as they are substandard, no individual specification, fitment inconvenience do to long gap between assessment and distribution, lack of professional expertise of Alimco officials), Creation of resource rooms (2 for each district 80% of them without basic equipments and teaching learning materials), teacher training programs, transport and escort allowance annually through DBT, reader allowance to blind, participation of CWSN in Anjali festival, DFTs, SRPs at resource rooms, parental counseling, engagement of resource persons and special education teachers etc. State Institute of Training is also issuing guidelines for Education of CWSN and conducting teacher trainings occasionally.

### 4. Trained professional main power for CWSN:

There are only 27 resource persons (2 for each district) and 54 special education teachers (4 for each district) to meet the inclusive education needs of 23629 CWSN (13319 boys and 10310 girls) in 23165 government schools as per the official UDISE reports. All the Resource Persons and Special Education teachers are working on contractual basis under the directorate of Samagra Shiksha from 2012 and 2016 respectively. The government has not created a single permanent post for resource persons and special education teachers in the school education department so far. Many districts of Jammu division were found without resource persons and special education teachers.

The job profile of resource persons were teacher trainings at district level, school readiness programs (SRPs) at resource centers, parental counseling, mobility and ambulatory training, referral therapeutic services, facilitating the use of aids and appliances, paying school visits and participating in IEP formation along with special education teachers and general teachers. Special education teachers had the assignment of imparting special education to the CWSN, IEP formation, School readiness programmes etc.

Most of the time the services of RPs and SETs are utilized in surveys, data compilation, preparation of escort allowance, travel allowance, stipend girls beneficiary lists, fidelity reports after DBTs, UDID Registration of Children with disabilities, assessment camp, distribution camp, training preparations at district level, thus affecting their basic job of attending CWSN at Resource Centers and during school visits.

## 5. Teachers

Majority of the teachers have indicated that they have received no training to teach the special children. Out of 102,581 government teachers only 18000 teachers i.e 2% have received so for trainings in inclusive education through samagra shiksha , SIE and DIET. The trainings received are of short duration ranging from 3 days to 5 days which include Braille training, sign language ,curriculum modification, Autism and general orientation trainings about inclusive education. According to the teachers, majority of the normal children are willing to mingle with the CWSN (73.33%), teachers (88.42%) find it difficult to teach blind, Deaf ,and intellectually impaired children in an inclusive setup. 58.6% teachers are unaware about the SIE guidelines for the education of CWSN. 79% teachers do not have any individualized education plan for children with severe disabilities. The teachers have taken measures to improve the enrollment of the CWSN through conducting field level survey during Enrollment drives. The problems faced by the teachers are barrier filled class rooms, non availability of Audi visual aids, Braille books ,lack of special trainings in Braille ,Sign Language, Behavioral management, non flexible Curriculum, lack of parental cooperation etc. There are no clear cut guide lines about age appropriate admissions and grading of such children.

## 6. Parents:

Majority of parents do not find any difficulty in educating their children having mild disability. Parents 68.52% having children with severe disabilities (blindness, Cerebral palsy, muscular dystrophy, autism, intellectual impairment etc.) find it unsafe to send their children in normal schools due to barrier filled environment of the schools. 78% parents are not satisfied with the aids and appliances ( hearing aids , Calipers, Orthosis, MSEID kits, prosthesis) provided by samagra shiksha due to substandard material, fitment issues, and being not specific to individual needs of the child. 69% parent find it hard to escort their CWSN having severe disabilities to the schools. Only 2% of parents of children with special needs visit schools once a month.

### Recommendations:

After discussions with parents , teachers , resource persons ,special education teachers and other stake holders of inclusive education it was desired that much focus should be at gross root level so that cwns will be benefited more. All the schools should be barrier free in physical, recreational, academic and emotional aspects. There should be accessible class rooms, accessible drinking water facilities, disabled friendly toilets, midday meal areas in all the schools. Ramps, railings, toilets must meet the access standards of universal design. Capacity building inclusive education teacher training programs must be on regular basis so that every teacher gets equipped with basic skills to deal with CWSN. Engagement of more resource persons and special education teachers for trainings and education of CWSN.

Standard aids and appliances must be provided to meet the individual needs of CWSN. All the resource centers must be equipped with all equipments and more resource centers must be sanctioned. Additional facilities required for class rooms such as walking sticks, group hearing aids, computer classes, physiotherapy, special chairs and tables, audio-video tapes, hearing aids, tri-cycles, Sports items, arm chairs, speech therapy, Braille watch, swing etc., need to be provided to the schools in general and Resource rooms in particular. There should be hurdle free and smooth examination pattern for CWSN from primary to secondary level. Each text book must contain guidelines of SIE regarding curriculum flexibility, examination and fee concessions concessions . Parents

of CWSN must get due representation in school management committees. Inclusive sports festivals must be organized to encourage CWSN in the field of sports.

40 percent of the CWSN school aged children are still out of the schools. Hence, measures need to be taken to enroll all the school aged children without considering their caste, creed, disability etc.

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