

A Study on the Educational Experiences of the Children with Disabilities Studying in Special Schools in Guwahati City, Assam

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Abstract

Education is an inherent right for every child irrespective of their caste, class, status, religion etc. Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) enumerates that everyone has the right to education and it shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. Though there are numerous provisions for providing free and compulsory education to the children but even in the 21st century it is a challenging task when it comes to educating a disabled child. The present study has largely to deal with understanding the educational experiences of the students with disabilities studying in special schools in Guwahati city, Assam. The study is based on both primary and secondary data. Purposive sampling has been used to select the samples. The researcher feels that the findings of the study would give a clear scenario of the status of education of children with disability in the society. On the basis of the research findings suggestions are also given to overcome the challenges for proper implementation of quality education in special schools. Thus, it is hoped that this study will act as a source of reference for any future initiatives to be taken up in this field and measures can be taken for further emphasizing the practice of imparting quality education in the society and also for the social development of the state.

Keywords: Children with disability (CwD), education, special schools

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I. INTRODUCTION

Education is an inherent right for every child irrespective of their caste, class, status, religion etc. Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) enumerates that everyone has the right to education and it shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. Since 1948 many international covenants and treaties have enumerated the provision of right to education in it. Article 13 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) outlines the responsibility of states to recognize, respect, and uphold the right to education for everyone. Article 28 of Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) provides that all children should have a right to free primary education. UNESCO Convention against Discrimination in Education, the International Covenant on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, the Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of their Families, and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities are some of the major international covenants on right to education. Article 45 of the Indian constitution also affirms free and compulsory education for all children until they complete the age of fourteen years.

Though there are numerous provisions for providing free and compulsory education to the children but even in the 21st century it is a challenging task when it comes to educating a disabled child. The level of education of a disabled child is dependent on a number of factors including family income, availability of school facility, distance from school, physical

and social access to education etc. A person with disability faces a variety of challenges depending on the nature and degree of disability.

According to the Indian census 2011, there are 7.86 million children and young adults in the age group 0-19 years who are disabled. Among them, 61 percent of the aged 5-19 years are attending educational institution, 12 percent are dropouts and 27 percent never attended an educational institution. 54 percent of the disabled children with multiple disabilities never attended educational institutions. Also, 50% of the children with mental illness never attended educational institution. On the other hand, according to the United Nations (UN), though India has made substantial progress in the enrolment of children in primary education but the scenario for children with disability is still sluggish. Out of 2.9 million children with disabilities in India, 990,000 children aged 6 to 14 years (34 percent) are out of school. There are noted discrepancies related to the number of disabled children population in India and their level of access to education. Child line Foundation, an NGO working for the rights of children in India cited that 35.29 percent of all people living with disabilities are children and only 1 percent of children have access to school. According to World Bank Report (2007) 38 per cent of the children with disabilities in the age group 6-13 years are out of school Irrespective of the different sources of data on disability, the fact is that still in this 21st century lot many children with disabilities are deprived of their basic right, i.e. right to quality education (Das & Kattumuri, 2011).

With the pace of development in India, there has been a mushrooming in establishment of special schools for CwD in

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different corners of the country. With the increase in establishment of these special schools their functional demerits also started to come into picture. The most important of all was that it was only scattered in urban areas and did not cover the rural population and was also a task of luxury to enroll student in these schools (Kalita, 2013).

The present study has largely to deal with the understanding the educational experiences of the CwD studying in the special schools and how it reinforces them to reach their highest potential and achieve their goals.

II. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- To understand the educational experiences of CwD studying in special schools
- To determine the challenges and problems in studying in special schools
- To comprehend the outcomes of studying in special schools

III. LIMITATION OF THE STUDY

- Due to paucity of time only two Special Schools could be visited for field work study.
- A total of 30 respondents (CwD) were interviewed.
- Visually impaired Children's interview schedule was filled in by the researcher herself.
- Help of an interpreter was taken to communicate with the deaf and dumb students.

IV. DATA SOURCES AND METHODS

The study was conducted in the government special schools established in Guwahati city, Assam. This is a mixed method i.e. both qualitative as well as quantitative study based on the data collected from the CwD studying in special schools. Both primary and secondary and secondary sources of data were collected. In the study for the purpose of collecting primary data, interview schedule was used and separate questionnaires were prepared using both open ended and close-ended questions for the CwD. For collecting secondary data, available materials in the form of published works, local newspapers, internet sources, research articles etc.

V. POPULATION AND THE SAMPLE

The population of the present study consists of the entire CwD of Guwahati city, Assam who is studying in the Special schools. Purposive sampling method was used to select respondents for the study. A total of 60 samples were selected from the two special schools in Guwahati.

Table: 1 Total number of PwD by age group and sex in Assam

Sl.no	Age group	Total number of person with Disability		
		Persons	Male	Female
1.	0-4	22,587	12,002	10,585
2.	5-9	35,211	19,190	16,021

3.	10-19	76,681	42,041	34,640
4.	20-29	69,749	37,982	31,767
5.	30-39	62,662	34,941	27,721
6.	40-49	57,728	32,989	24,739
7.	50-59	47,178	26,075	21,103
8.	60-69	49,075	24,257	24,818
9.	70-79	36,350	17,318	19,032
10.	80-89	15,779	7,330	8,449
11.	90+	6,478	2,963	3,515
12.	Age not stated	587	297	290
Total		480,065	257,385	222,680

(Source: Census of India, 2011)

From the above table it can be seen that total number of PwD in Assam from different age group are 4,80,065. Among that 257,385 are males and 222,680 are females. The number of PwD (male) is higher from the age group of 0-59 than PwD (female). But from the age group of 60-90 and above the number seems to be in a reverse trend where the number of PwD (female) is higher than the PwD (male).

VI. FINDINGS

1. The male respondent representation was 57% while the female representation was 43% from the sample.
2. The highest percentage of the respondents was from Scheduled Class with 37%. The next higher percentage of group was the Other Backward Class, General and Scheduled Tribe with 27%, 23% and 13% respectively.
3. Majority of the respondents were from the section of visually impaired with 37%. The hearing impaired was of 33% and speech impaired and Children with multiple disabilities were 23% and 7% respectively.
4. The above figure shows that 90% of the respondents were disabled by birth. Whereas 7% had the cause of illness for being disabled and only 3% were disabled by accident.
5. It was seen that 83% of the respondents were having disability on the profound scale. On the moderate scale of disability there were 14% of the respondents. And the least were of 3% with mild extent of disability.
6. A majority of the respondents with 87% received the family support and encouragement whereas only 13% of them were denied the support and encouragement from their family for their education.
7. All the respondents said that they received guidance and support from their teachers in schools.
8. The most preferred subject among the respondents was the co-curricular activities. Mathematics, social science and art and crafts were almost equally preferred. Whereas the least preferred was English and the Regional Language.

9. 93% of the respondents said that the behavior of their teachers towards them is understanding. 7% of the respondents said that their teacher shows pity towards them at times. Whereas none responded that the behavior of the teachers being indifferent or nasty.
10. 60% of the children in special schools said that they don't face any physical barriers in schools. Whereas 40% respondents said that they faced problem in access to the physical environment in schools.
11. 90% of the respondents had no prior knowledge about the government duties or any policies and initiatives towards them. Whereas only 10% of them responded that they knew about some of the government policies and initiatives towards them.
12. 100% of the respondent feels that their disability acts as a hindrance for acquiring a quality education.
13. 100% of the respondents receives scholarships from the government.
14. 77% of the respondents said that they were enrolled in normal schools whereas 23% of the respondents were directly enrolled in the special schools.
15. 73% of the respondents which constitutes a majority didn't have a wish to study in a normal school. But a 27% of the respondents wished to study in a normal school.

VII. SUGGESSTIONS

Based on the findings of the study and after the analysis it is clear that for providing a quality education to the CwD in the special schools and for making their educational experiences better the following steps can be taken:

1. Determining of the disability before birth or at the onset of birth can be helpful for the parents to make decisions for their child's future.
2. Efforts should also be taken by the normal mainstream schools to include the CwD as measure of inclusive education.
3. The amount of scholarship that the every CwD are getting should be increased with the growing demand of the society.
4. Any sort of physical barriers in the schools should be removed.
5. Adequate no. of aids and appliances, like hearing aids, tricycle, wheel chair, blind stick, low vision aids, Braille materials etc. should be supplied by the school.
6. As the aids are costly, hence proper care while installation and proper maintenance after that should be taken by the schools management.
7. PTM should be conducted by the school to get in touch with the parents and discussing about their child.
8. School should arrange a visit by any counselor or clinical psychologist in the school to counsel the students as well as the parents.
9. As the students are more interested toward the co-curricular activities, hence they should be made engaged in fun filled activities for better learning process.
10. Different children might have different potentials. It should be the duty of the school teachers to help the CwD to reach their highest potential based on their various
- interests.
11. All the teacher in special schools should also go through various orientation and training programs from time to time.
12. Vocational training and rehabilitation arrangement should be undertaken after achieving sufficient maturity by CwD.
13. The school authority should organize periodic field trips to expose children to various situations and provide community based instructions.

VIII. CONCLUSION

The existence of the disabled is not uncommon in any society. The disabled are the citizen of the country and so they have every right to get proper education according to their needs and abilities. It is true that every student has an inherent right to education on the basis of equality of opportunity. Only proper care, education and training can make disabled child capable of doing the things which are able to do. Therefore, it is the duty of the Govt., society and educational institution of this democratic nation.

It can also be concluded from the study that though the concept of inclusive education in gaining ground in the 21st century but the interest of the children should also be taken into account whether they want to study in a normal school or in a special school as there can be a huge environmental, physical and attitudinal difference in both the schools. Hence imparting a quality education to the CwD should be the goal; no matter if they study in a normal school or in a special school.

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