

Education for Children with Special Needs in Himachal Pradesh : A Brief Overview

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ABSTRACT

This paper is focused on education for the children with special needs in school education system. Presently, these students are educated along with the normal students in the same class and environment, regardless of whether the students are working above or below the typical academic level for their age. Teachers often nurture a relationship between a student with special needs and a same-age student without a special educational need. Inclusion settings allow children with and without disabilities to play and interact every day, even when they are receiving therapeutic services. The paper also focuses on the status of special education services available for children with special needs in the State. The facilities provided to such children by the State and Central Government are highlighted in the study. The Government is contributing in inclusive education at elementary level through Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan.

Keywords: CWSN, Right to Education, Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan.

Introduction

Himachal Pradesh is a beautiful and hilly land of God. It is well known for its beauty and education standard. The State occupies its place in the top States in literacy as per the census of 2011. It has twelve districts and Hamirpur district is among the top districts in the country for literacy. Education rates among women are quite encouraging in the State. The standard of education in the State has reached to a considerably high level as compared to other States in India. There are 10738 elementary, 846 high and 1552 senior secondary schools under the Department of Education, H. P. Govt. The State Govt. is doing sincere efforts to provide quality education to all the children as education is the fundamental right of every child. The purpose of education is to ensure that all students gain access to the knowledge, skills, and information that will prepare them to contribute to India's communities and workplaces in new era. The central purpose becomes more challenging as schools accommodate students with increasingly diverse backgrounds and abilities. As we strive to meet these challenges, the involvement and cooperation of educators, parents, and community leaders is vital for the creation of better and more inclusive schools especially for children with special needs. Children with Special Needs (CWSN) are the children who have suffered from a specific disease and need extra care having special needs. A child with disability, namely, visual, hearing, loco-motor, learning disability, mentally retarded, multiple disabled and speech impaired is named as CWSN. This group of children is in need of additional support, depends on the extent to which schools need to adapt their curriculum, teaching, and organization and/or to provide additional human or material resources so as to stimulate efficient and effective learning for these children.

(1) Role of Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) in Education of CWSN in Himachal Pradesh:

Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) is the government's millennial 'Education for All' umbrella programme of education for all

goals are that: (i) all children aged 6-14 will be in some form of education by 2003, ii) will complete 5 years primary education by 2007, and iii) will complete 8 years education by 2010. Disability indicators are included in the government agreement for SSA, although what exactly these are and whether they are taken on at local level is unclear. In fact, although one of the official SSA objectives is the enrolment of children with disabilities, the World Bank (2004) SSA project appraisal does not list disability as a key indicator, unlike gender, SC and ST. There are three major parts of this program that benefit people with disabilities. The first is Rs.1200 allocation per annum per child with a disability. This money is supposed to go towards assistive devices, materials in alternative learning formats, and anything else that would assist children with a disability in being included in a mainstream classroom. However, the money is funneled through the district or school level, and it is therefore impossible to ensure that it will be spent on the child with a disability. The second part of SSA that is designed to include students with disability is the policy that each district will formulate its own plan for children with disabilities; and the final part is that key institutions will be encouraged to collaborate to further support these students with disabilities (Kohama, 2012).

The fact that there are still many children out-of-school in 2006 demonstrates not only how behind this programme already is, but also how over-ambitious the infrastructure-led SSA goals were in the first place. For example, of the 1 million new classrooms that should have been built by 2007, there are only 300,000; 100,000 of which are not fully functional (Lal, 2005). A part of the "compelling" rationale for World Bank assistance to SSA was the continuous monitoring and evaluation and the "built-in accountability mechanism at the school and community levels" (World Bank, 2004: 2). With donor support of the government feedback system, it was hoped that, "the development of mechanisms to assure cross-state and cross district observation, dialogue, and learning for program refinement could be among SSA's most enduring features." (World Bank, 2004). However, despite an awareness of SSA lagging so far behind in the achievement of its intended targets, there is apparently no sign of

accelerated political momentum to lend a sense of urgency to the task (Lal, 2005). This is perhaps a reflection of there being "...no condition of effectiveness..." in the World Bank interest-free loan contributing towards the funding of SSA (World Bank, 2004: 8).

With a planned central: state government budget ratio of 85:15 changing to 50:50 in 2007, there is a high risk of some states not being able to afford to finance the programme (Govinda and Biswal, 2006; Lal, 2005), and perhaps an accompanying weakening of political will and programme implementation. The lack of political voice of the poorest people this programme is intended to assist, further pushes education to the lower strata of politicians' agendas (Lal, 2005).

SSA ensures that every child with special needs, irrespective of the kind, category and degree of disability, is provided meaningful and quality education. Hence, SSA has adopted a zero rejection policy (see Fig. I). This means that no child having special needs should be deprived of the right to education and taught in an environment, which is best, suited to his/her learning needs. These include special schools, EGS, AIE or even home-based education.

The major thrust of SSA is on inclusion or mainstreaming CWSN into the fabric of formal elementary schooling. Experiences of programmes like DPEP and various research findings have shown that inclusion is best determined by the individual needs of the child. Most children with special needs can be enrolled and retained in regular schools if adequate resource support is provided to them, whereas there are others who might have to be provided some kind of pre-integration programmes, before they can be mainstreamed in a classroom. There might also be still some CWSN with severe profound disabilities, who would require an educational programme and intensive specialized support completely beyond the purview and scope of a formal school in the current situation (Kumar, S., 2014).

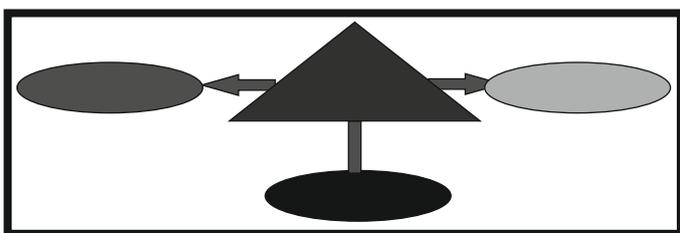


Fig. I: Policy of inclusion of CWSN in SSA

“Thus, SSA has adopted a more expansive and a broad-based understanding of the concept of inclusion, wherein a multi-option model of educating CWSN is being implemented.”

The S.S.A. lists eight priority areas in the implementation of Right to Education (RTE), 2009 in the context of education of children with special needs. These are (i) survey for identification of CWSN, (ii) assessment of CWSN, (iii) providing assistive devices, (iv) networking with NGOs/Government schemes, (v) Barrier free access, (vi) training of teachers on Inclusive Education, (vii) appointment of resource, (viii) teachers in schools, Curricula adaptation/textbooks/appropriate teaching learning material.

Himachal Pradesh Govt. is quite sincere in implementing RTE, 2009 in the context of CWSN in the whole state. According to Elementary Education Statistics, 2009-10 and 2011-12, in 2009-10, 22040 CWSN were identified and covered under SSA which was 2.45% of the total enrollment and 19643 (89.12%) were enrolled in schools, 10 were enrolled in EGS/AIE centre and 2387 were covered under Home Based Education. SSA also trained 1172 elementary school teachers through Foundation Course-Special Education Distance Education 90 days course from M.P. Bhoj Open University, Bhopal. 12766 (58.96% of 21653) special aids and appliances were also provided under SSA to various CWSN in the State. 7731 (51.38% of 15046) schools were provided barrier free access. In this year 264.48 lac were approved by the Govt. from which 125.50 lac (47.45%) were utilized by the State. In 2010-11, 577.26 lac were sanctioned by the Govt. for CWSN. In 2012-13, 1.11% and in 2013-14, 1.44% CWSN enrolled in Primary schools and in 2012-13, 1.44% and in 2013-14, 1.41% CWSN of the total enrollment enrolled in the schools. In 2012-13 and 2013-14, 0.31% Primary and 0.30% upper Primary special schools are there in the State which providing education to CWSN.

(2) Status of Special Schools for CSWN in Himachal Pradesh:

The status of special schools for the education of CWSN in Himachal Pradesh is given in the Table as follows.

Special Schools for CWSN (2013-14)

Type of School	MR	VI & HI	OH	Multi Disability
Govt.	---	1	----	2
NGO	17	4	1	5

Source: (Himachal Database, 2015) & List of Special Schools (2014).

It is clear from the Table that there is hardly much special school for CWSN either at primary or elementary or secondary level of education and there is no such school at higher secondary level in Himachal Pradesh. The percentages of such schools at the national level are also quite low but still higher than that in the state.

Under Inclusive Education of SSA, CWSN are identified and taken care of in normal schools. CWSN friendly provisions have been made in schools so as to make schools barrier free for them. Besides these, there are special schools meant for children with disabilities of severe nature.

In the year 2014-15 in Himachal Pradesh total 15,068 CWSN were identified suffering from one or other disability. Out of which 13,191 have been integrated in formal schools and for 1,877 different strategies have been adopted to bring them into the fold of education system. For these children Home-Based Programme has been introduced and implemented at elementary level in the age group of 6-14 years in Himachal Pradesh. 520 children have been adopted by 23 NGOs in different districts and remaining are being covered by in-service trained teachers. 12,352 Individual Education Programme (IEP) have been prepared for every child under HBE and accordingly goals were fixed for every three months. For mild and moderate categories, functional academic curriculum has been implemented in the first

been organized and 1,639 aids and appliances were provided to the needy children (Kumar, S., 2015). The special schools working in this field in Himachal Pradesh are (i) Babu Jagjivan Ram Trust for Social Development, Una, Distt. Una., (ii) Composite Regional Centre, Sundernagar, Distt. Mandi, (iii) DHLS Study centre of AIISH, Mansanganhri, Mysore at IGMC Shimla, Distt. Shimla, (iv) Prem Asram Institute of Sisters of Charity, Una, Distt. Una, (v) EVTC Education cum Vocation Training Centre, Sundernagar, Distt. Mandi., (vi) Deaf and Dumb School, Dhalli, Distt. Shimla, (vii) School for Physically Handicapped Children, Dharamshala, Distt. Kangra, (viii) Teaching and Vocational Training Centre for Physically Handicapped, Lunapani, Distt. Mandi., (ix) Aastha Special School, Nahan, Distt. Sirmour., (x) Chetna Association, Swami Vivekananda Public School, Kandrou, Distt. Bilaspur, (xi) Deep Sikha Association for the Welfare of M.R. Persons, Hamirpur, Distt. Hamirpur, (xii) Kamla Ashram, Bharoli Bagaur, Distt. Hamirpur, (xiii) Jagriti Research and Rehabilitation Society for Special Children, Chachiot, Distt. Mandi, (xiv) H P State Branch of National Association for the Blind, Kullu, Distt. Kullu, (xv) Ganpati Educational Society, Kuniyar, Distt. Solan. (Himachal Database, 2015).

(3) The facilities for CWSN in Himachal Pradesh:

The State and Central Govt. have launched various schemes for the CWSN. The researcher has tried to highlight the important schemes in this paper with reference to fulfill eight priority areas as enlisted earlier.

(A) Centrally Sponsored Schemes: For the Purpose of Purchasing Assisted Device the Central Govt. has made provision for purchasing hearing machine, wheel chair, tricycle, caliper, duplicate organs, etc. up to Rs. 8000/- under this scheme. The institutions which provide these assisted devices are (i) Red Cross Society, Kinnaur, Mandi and Una. (ii) D.R.D.A. Chamba, Solan, Hamirpur, Bilaspur, Shimla, Sirmour and Kangra (iii) District Handicapped Rehabilitation Centres, Hamirpur and Kangra (iv) Handicapped Welfare Centres, Nalagarh, Distt. Solan (v) Indian Development Corporation, Nagrota Bagwan, Distt. Kangra and (vi) Composite Resource Centre, Sundernagar, Distt. Mandi provides training and certificate programs to the volunteers, Govt. employees and workers involved in village level multipurpose rehabilitation programs for disabled persons. The centre is also involved in the medical checkup through various camps and make aware the target group and society.

(B) State Sponsored Schemes: The integrated scheme of the State Govt. 'SAHYOG' for disabled persons involves the following Objectives:

(1) To conduct the survey of disabled persons in the State and to identify and investigate the disabilities in the children/persons. The Health department of the State Govt. organizes medical camps to issue the Disability Certificates to the disabled.

(2) The State Ministry and Department of Social Justice and Empowerment organizes awareness camps and workshops for the working organizations, disability unions, disabled persons, women organizations and Panchayat institutes working in the field of disability at the village, block and district levels.

(3) The State Govt. is providing fellowships to the disabled students having disability up to 40% or above whose parents' income is less than Rs. 5000/- p.m.

Class	Day scholars	Hostellers
First to Fifth	150/-	300/-
Sixth to Eighth	200/-	400/-
Ninth to Tenth	250/-	500/-
10+1 and 10+2	300/-	600/-
Graduation	350/-	700/-
B. Ed.	400/-	800/-
Master Degree	450/-	900/-

(4) The State Department of Social Justice and Empowerment provides training of draftsman, electronic mechanic, cutting and tailoring, motor vehicle mechanic, computer application, beauty parlor in professional education institutes, Industrial Training Institutes to eligible candidates free of cost and also provides Rs. 1000/- p.m. as scholarship. The annual income of the parent or guardian of the eligible candidate must be less than Rs. 100000/- .

(5) The disabled persons with disability of 40% or more having annual income less than Rs. 300000/- in rural areas and Rs. 500000/- in urban areas are provided with loan and subsidy of 20% by the State Department of Social Justice and Empowerment for opening mini industrial units.

(6) The private employers and the disabled candidates doing praiseworthy services are honoured with Role Model Award by the Himachal Pradesh Govt. every year.

(7) The Govt. provides one time financial assistance of Rs. 8000/- to the person who marries disabled person having disability of 40% to 75% and Rs. 15000/- to the person who marries to disabled person of disability 75% to 100%.

(8) The District Welfare Office issues the disability identity card to the disabled person having disability 40% or above for the entitlement of free travel facility all over the state in Himachal Road Transport Corporation buses and to avail other facilities provided by the Govt.

(9) The eligible disabled persons are provided handicapped pension of Rs. 330/- p.m. whose annual income from all the sources is less than Rs. 9000/-.

(10) To and fro bus fare is allowed to the CWSN along with one attendant to medical camps for formal assessment. 43 medical assessment camps for CWSN have been organized in 2014-15 and 1639 aids and appliances provided to needy children.

(11) 2 Day Care Centres in Primary schools have been established at Shimla and Mandi. These special wings are rehabilitating around 46 Mentally Retarded children with the help of trained special educators.

(12) The District Resource Centre at Hamirpur and Kangra are

providing services to identify the disable persons and to take steps for the treatment of the disability. These DRC's are also providing special services like physiotherapy, occupational therapy, audiological assessment and duplicate organs, hearing instruments, wheel chairs, etc. The guidance and counseling are provided for the training, education and professional training.

Conclusion

In the end, it can be said that in order to achieve the real purpose of education developmental activities such as elementary education, education for CWSN, adult education, health, food and employment should be interlinked and have a combined influence on the communities as a whole. The provision of residential Ashram schools is only one of the many strategies to bring about inclusive development of the children with special needs. The Government of India is trying to improve their education system and make it completely inclusive and the State Govt. is also providing the right platform in the form of various schemes and scholarships for CWSN. However, it is important to be realistic about the time span in which this change will occur. Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, or the Education for All initiative, was created not only for people with disabilities, but because of discrepancies in the general education sector. The education system in Himachal Pradesh is focusing on better quality education for all. It is time for policies to start aligning with realities on the ground, and for students of all ability levels to receive the education they deserve.

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