

Schools' Readiness for Implementation of Inclusive Education in Kohima, Nagaland

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Abstract—Inclusion is a philosophy which is anti-discriminatory and based on the belief that everybody, regardless of their differences can contribute to the society. Inclusive Education (IE) aims at accepting and accommodating everyone in the social settings, making each member feel valued, respected, and included thereby, creating and celebrating a larger inclusive society. The Article 45 of the Indian constitution mandates free and compulsory education for children up to the age of 14 emphasizing that education is a fundamental right. Consequently, the policy of Inclusive Education embraces diversity and recognizes the right of each and every child, the right to be educated and live as a productive member of the society. However, to make inclusive education a reality, adequate preparation such as creation of child-friendly schools and disability – friendly environments are pre-requisites for children to make their entry into the school. In Nagaland, the policy of Inclusive Education was enforced soon after the document of Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA, 2008) on ‘no rejection policy’ was announced. And, although IE has gained importance since then, it is felt that schools in Kohima are still in their advent in terms of implementing IE as there seems much to explore and much to gain from the policy. Despite the positive steps taken by the government to adopt the policy, the general primary and elementary schools that came under this study appear to lack in many aspects, including the minimum requisite infrastructural facilities and the preparation of general teachers to handle children with disabilities. This might have resulted in low enrolment or no enrolment of children with disabilities in the schools. This paper on ‘Ready School’ is an attempt to find out the dispositions of schools in Kohima in terms of infrastructure, teacher competency, school’s collaboration and linkages with other departments or agencies for implementing inclusive education.

Index Terms—Inclusion; Inclusive Education; Ready school; Facilities; Teachers’ competency, collaboration.

I. INTRODUCTION

Inclusive Education is an approach to educating children both with or without disabilities in the same classroom. It is based on the assumption that children with special needs can be educated with some help in the neighborhood schools. Children with special needs are those who are challenged with various problems such as that of vision, hearing, movement, or intellectual disability. Such children may require support of a specially trained teacher and special equipment and most children can benefit if these facilities are provided in the schools.

Inclusive schools are institutions wherein each student, irrespective of their differences and abilities are accepted in a positive and supportive common learning environment. In an inclusive school, diversity is embraced and learners are given the opportunity to develop to their full potential. Here, children learn together and these are places where foundation is laid for an inclusive society. However, for each student to succeed, accessibility and supports are necessary. According to the India Country Office of the UNICEF report, many schools in the country is still barrier-filled and unsafe for children with disabilities, which hampers their access to classrooms, toilets, libraries, playgrounds, and other learning areas (UNICEF, 2016).

School’s Readiness is an integral component of inclusive education. It is a broad concept having three dimensions which are interlinked viz., ready children, ready school, and ready families (UNCF, 2012). For successful implementation of Inclusive education, children should be ready, schools should be ready and families should be ready. Ready children are those that possess basic minimum skills and knowledge to be in enrolled in school, ready school encompasses creation of child-friendly and disabled-friendly physical and social environment, teacher competence, variation in

curriculum while a ready family is characterized by supportive attitude towards inclusion. Parents' awareness of the policy, their positive attitude and support are essential as they are ones who knows best the strength and weaknesses of their child.

In Nagaland, although the implementation of the policy of Inclusive education was initiated way back during 2010- 2011, the enrolment of disabled children seems low in the neighborhood schools and it is often observed that these children are still out of school. This caught the investigator's attention to investigate schools' readiness to enroll them.

The present study was undertaken on 'School's Readiness,' to find out the dispositions of the general schools in Kohima for implementation of the policy of inclusive education.

II. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To find out the accessibility in the general neighborhood schools to special children.
2. To find out the availability of basic facilities such as classrooms, furniture, ramps, resource room, water, and toilet facilities.
3. To find out preparedness of teachers to handle special children
4. To find out teachers' perception of parents for the success of inclusive education.
5. To find out school's linkages and collaborations with other departments and agencies for inclusive education.

III. METHODOLOGY

A Descriptive Survey method was used for the study. This is found appropriate as the study will be on describing the conditions that exist and the processes that are going on and the effects that are evident (Best and Khan, 1999). A set of questionnaires having 14 items covering all the objectives of the present study was self-constructed by the investigator for collection of data from the respondents; the head teachers and teachers of the school to ascertain the readiness of the school towards implementing inclusive education.

IV. FINDINGS

The study on "School's readiness on the Implementation of Inclusive Education in Kohima Nagaland" aimed at finding if the schools within Kohima town had adequate means to accommodate specially-abled children under normal school environments. The data was collected using a set of questionnaires for respondents from various schools of Kohima.

1. Out of a total of 12 schools, 9 schools (75%) did not have specially-abled children enrolled while 3 (25%) schools reported to have admitted one each.

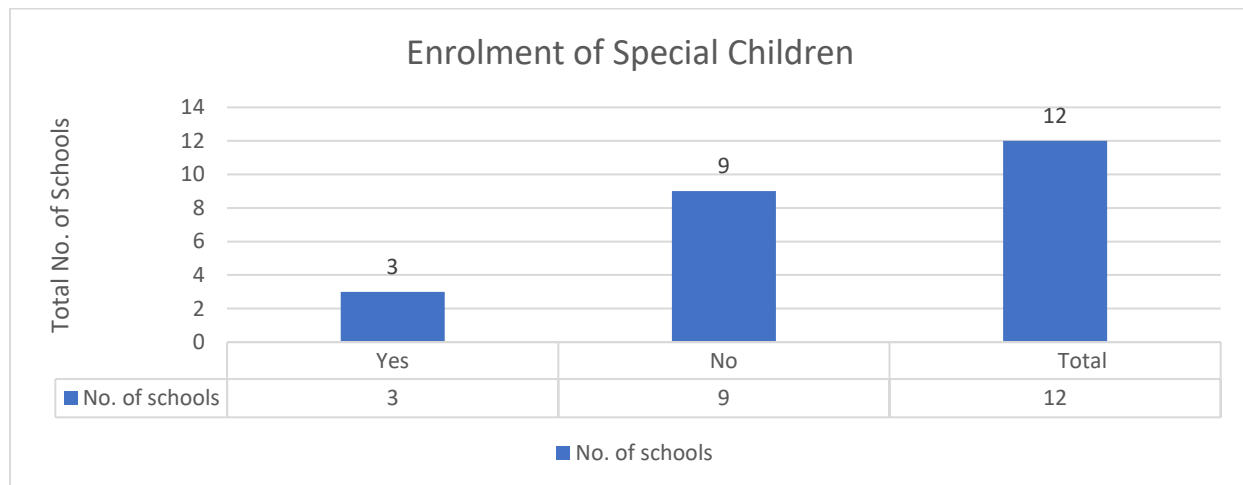


Fig.1: Figure showing enrolment of special children in general schools

2. It was found out that, out of a total of 12 schools, 6 schools responded positively with having the facilities to accommodate specially-abled children into their school. Whereas, a total of 6 schools were found not ready with appropriate facilities. The reasons being, 12% of the respondents asserted that classrooms were not

ready to accommodate, 23% reported the unavailability of separate resource/learning room, another 29% expressed unavailability of trained teachers. Of the total respondents, 18% declared the unavailability of special furniture while, another 18% asserted the constraints of time in giving special attention to the special students.

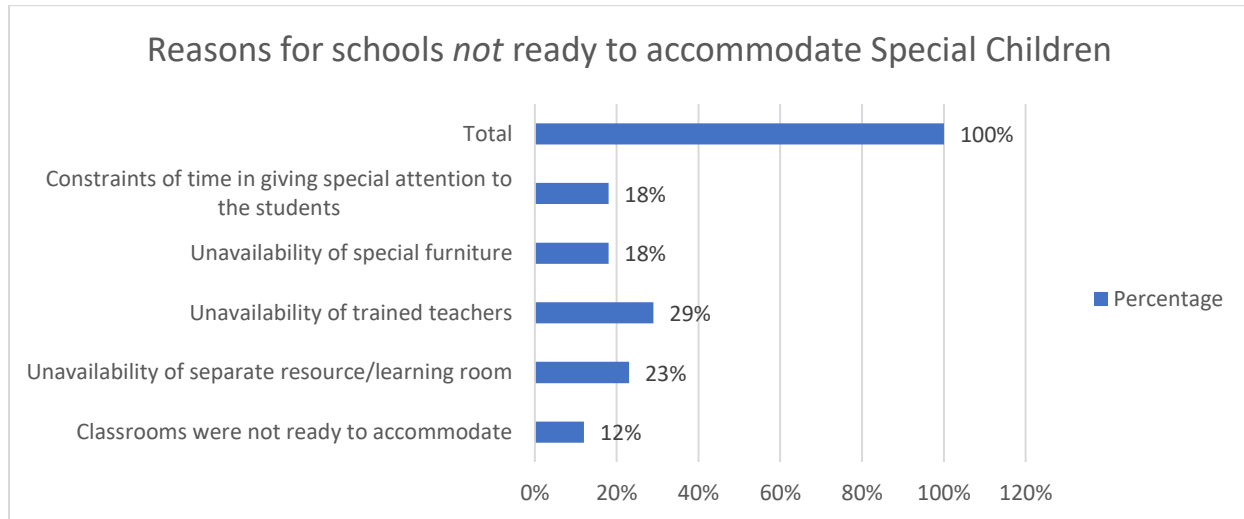


Fig. 2: Figure showing distribution of schools with reasons for being not ready to accommodate special children.

3. The study also revealed that, a total of 5 schools had knowledge about the parents of the students having awareness of the policy of education for disabled children. Whereas, 7 schools stated that the parents were not aware of the existence of such policies. It was disheartening to find out that 25% of the parents did not want to disclose the disability of their child therefore kept them at

home, another 44% stated that there was a little awareness of the policy among the parents for educating their special child, but they did not clearly know how to enroll. To another 25%, there was difficulty in making arrangements to send their child to school while 6% stated that no priority was given in the family to educate their special child.

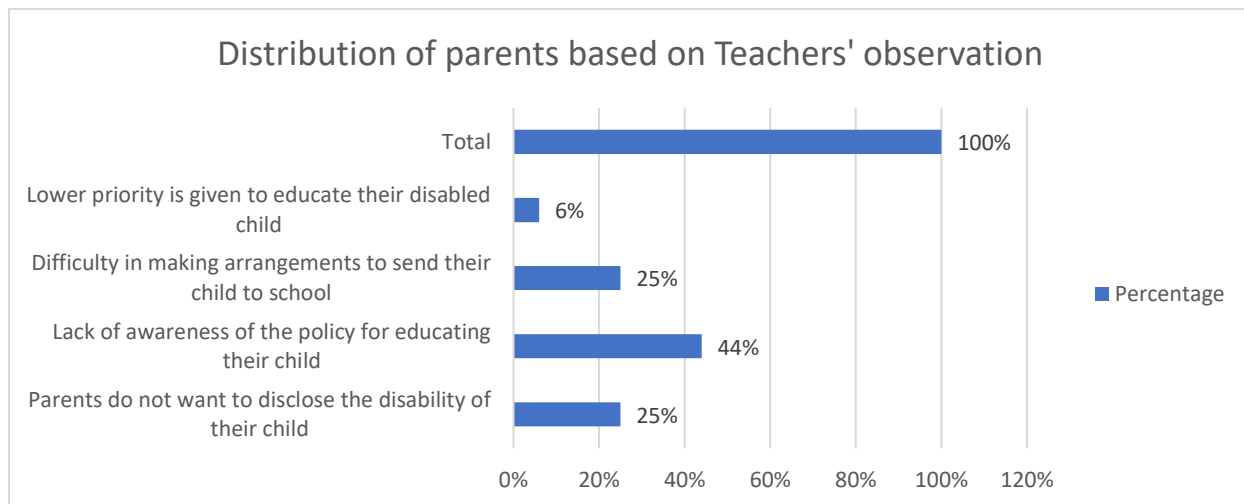


Fig. 3: Figure showing distribution of parents based on teachers' observation

4. Of the 12 schools under study, all (100%) of them fully agreed on the notion that, to achieve inclusive education, all teachers should firstly be given a general orientation.
5. It was found out that 5 schools had established collaborations with other agencies/departments, e.g. medical department for the students while 7 schools (58%) had not established any collaborations.
6. It was encouraging to find out that, to a total of 6 schools (50%), medical teams sometimes visited the school premises for medical check-up of the children while the remaining 6 (50%) schools stated that their school was never visited for such check-up.
7. The following responses were collected for the requirements for inclusion of special children in the schools
 8. Screening of children through a medical team (11%)
 9. Special funding (14%)
 10. Modification of infrastructure of the school (27%)
 11. Giving awareness to normal children about bringing of disabled children into their classroom (27%)
 12. Variety of curriculum for study (21%)

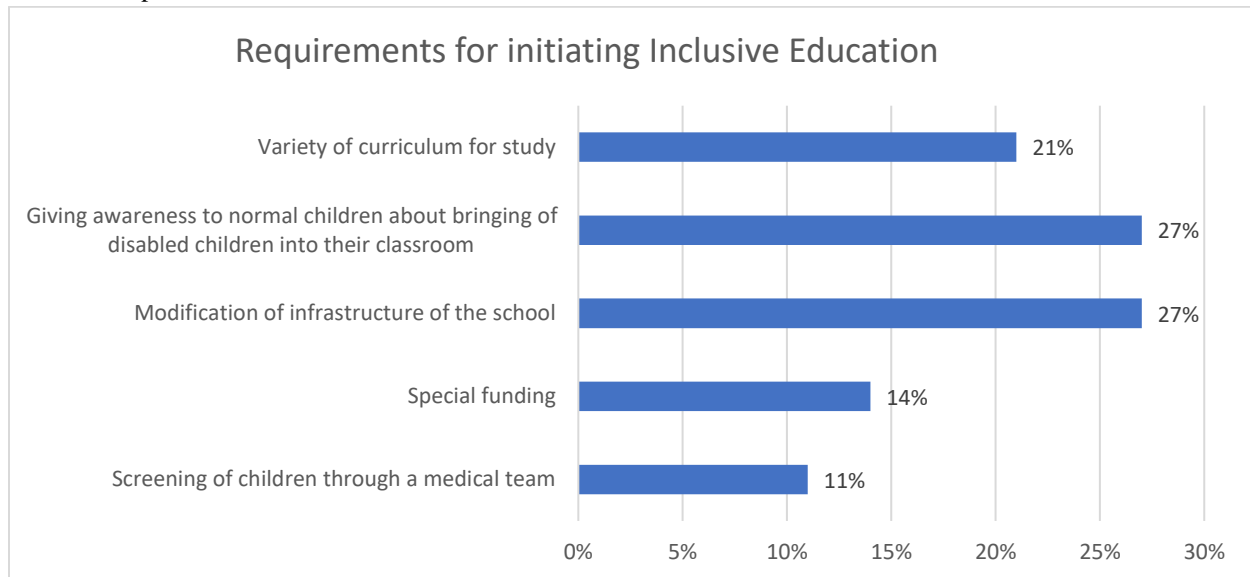


Fig. 4: Figure showing requirements for initiating Inclusive education in general schools in Kohima

13. Out of a total of 12 schools, 3 schools (25%) reported availability of ramps although without rails in the school premises while a total of 9 schools (75%) did not have this facility provided.
14. Out of a total of 12 schools, 7 schools (58%) stated that availability of accessible toilets in the school while 5 schools did not have proper toilet facilities for special children.
15. Out of a total of 12 schools, 7 schools (58%) stated the availability of good water facilities while 5 schools (42%) did not have the facilities.
16. Out of a total of 12 schools, 11 schools (92%) stated that the teachers were aware of the policy of inclusive education while 1 school (8%) was not aware of it.
17. Out of a total of 24 respondent teachers from the 12 schools, 10 respondents (42%) agreed that they were ready as a teacher if inclusive education

were to be implemented in their school while 14 respondents (58%) stated that they were not ready.

V. DISCUSSION

The findings from the survey conducted across 12 schools in Kohima showcases on the current situations and circumstances for facilitating the education of specially children. Firstly, it is concerning to find out that a high majority of the schools, 75%, have not enrolled special children, indicating a non-recognition of the importance of inclusive education and reflection of gaps in access or support. However, it was encouraging to observe that a quarter of the schools (25%) surveyed had special children enrolled, which may be an indicator that schools have taken the steps for enrolling special children. One significant barrier to accommodating specially-abled children in 75% of the school is the lack of readiness of the schools in terms of space, accessible toilets and water facilities, approach to the school, availability of resource rooms and adequate teacher strength. It was encouraging to find that half of the schools expressed the school's ability to accommodate special students, while the other the other half (50%) cited various obstacles such as unprepared classrooms, the absence of specialized equipment and trained teachers in addition to problem with time constraints for providing adequate attention to the special children. These findings underscore the urgent need for infrastructural improvements and teacher training to ensure inclusive education a reality. Moreover, there seems to be a disconnect between schools and parents regarding awareness of policies for educating disabled children. While some schools reported parental awareness, others cited reasons such as non-awareness of provisions that comes with inclusion properly. One of the facts that emerged out of the present study was reluctance of parents to disclose child's disabilities. This highlights the importance of improving communication channels between schools and parents, as well as enhancing public awareness campaigns about educational rights for special children. This attitude condition of parents also call for proper education of the policy. Interestingly, there is a unanimous agreement among schools regarding the necessity of providing orientation to all teachers for achieving inclusive education. This emphasizes the crucial role of

educators in creating an inclusive learning environment and indicates a willingness to invest in teacher development.

Collaborations with external agencies and departments vary among schools, with only 5 schools (42%) having established partnerships with medical department the remaining 58% are yet to collaborate with departments. This suggests a potential area for improvement in leveraging external support for meeting the diverse needs of specially-abled students. Infrastructure-wise, while some schools have made efforts to provide facilities like ramps and accessible toilets, it is assumed that there is still room for improvement, especially considering the diverse needs of students with disabilities. On the whole, these findings provide valuable insights into the current status of inclusive education in the surveyed schools of Kohima and highlight areas which needs proper actions to ensure equal access and support for all students, regardless of ability.

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