

A STUDY OF INCLUSIVE EDUCATION IN THE PRIMARY SCHOOLS OF KERALA

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Abstract

Considering the importance of inclusive education in bringing all students in the classroom irrespective of their strength and weakness, a research study was conducted in 150 primary schools of Kerala. The study tried to find out the types of disability among the special need students, the teachers' opinion in including disabled children in mainstream school, the academic and social problems faced by the children, the parental support in the education of special need students. The study culls out the suggestions for improving teaching learning conditions of disabled students in an inclusive environment. The study findings show low vision, mentally retarded and learning disabilities to be the most common disability among the students. The teachers pointed out that the disabled students were not able to follow the syllabus and they often lack concentration that led to indiscipline in the class. They suggested for adapted curriculum, assistive technology, adapted teaching learning material and combined efforts of resource teachers, parents, students, teachers and therapist to make the inclusive education successful.

Keywords: - *Inclusive Education*

Introduction

Inclusive education provides opportunities to the students with disabilities to study along with non-disabled peers in classrooms. Studies in the area point out various common issues related to the implementation of the inclusive education in our country like lack of flexibility in curriculum, inability to defend for themselves, lack of individual attention from the teachers to the special need students, lack of barrier free environment, neglect of the schools system towards children suffering from learning disability, etc. (Mohanty, 2016; Thomas and Jannet, 2012). Lack of trained teachers and permanent resource teachers in schools are the other burning problems faced by the inclusive schools. Sarao's (2016) study on obstacles and challenges in inclusive education in India concluded that preparation of teachers for inclusive education should be made compulsory in the entire teacher education programmes irrespective of secondary or elementary level.

In order to improve the inclusive education system, the teachers need to be trained in the area of inclusive teaching strategies that contribute to an overall inclusive learning environment in the classrooms. It is necessary to overcome the challenges in the area of inclusive education, like lack of cooperation from the peer group and teachers, negative attitude towards inclusive education, lack of resources and policies, etc. and to develop an inclusive classroom

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that is friendly, caring and supportive and also promoting self esteem among the disabled students (Das & Kattumuri, 2010).

Objectives, Methodology and Tools of the Study

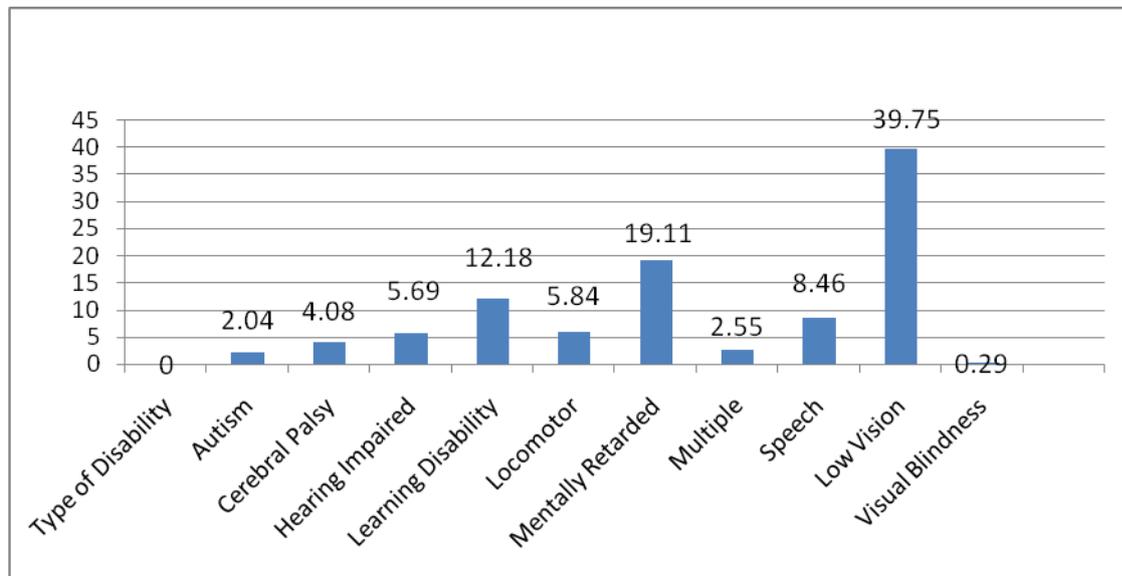
Keeping in view the challenges of inclusive education, a survey study was conducted in 150 primary schools of Kerala to find out the types of disability among the special need students, to study the teachers’ opinion in including disabled children in mainstream school, to study the academic and social problems faced by the children, to study the parental support in the education of special need students and to collect the views of teachers to improve the education of disabled students. A questionnaire on inclusive education was administered among the primary school teachers selected from a sample of 75 government primary schools and 75 aided primary schools in Kerala.

Analysis and Interpretation of Data

Types Disability among Primary School Students

The study shows that among the disabilities, children with low vision accounted to 39.75 percent followed by mentally retarded (19.11 percent). Table 1 shows that low vision, mentally retardation and learning disability are the most common disabilities among the primary school students in Kerala.

Table 1. Types Disability among Primary School Students in Kerala



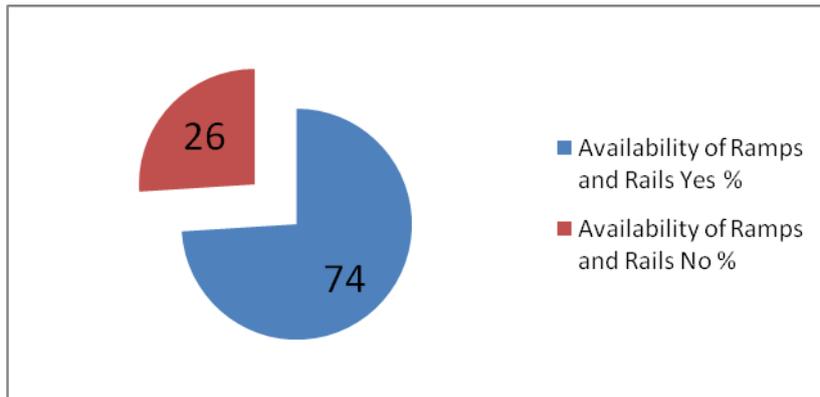
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Facilities Available in Schools

Out of the 150 sample schools, 74 percent of schools have the facility of Ramps and Rails and 26 percent of schools still lack the facility of ramps and rails (Fig 1).

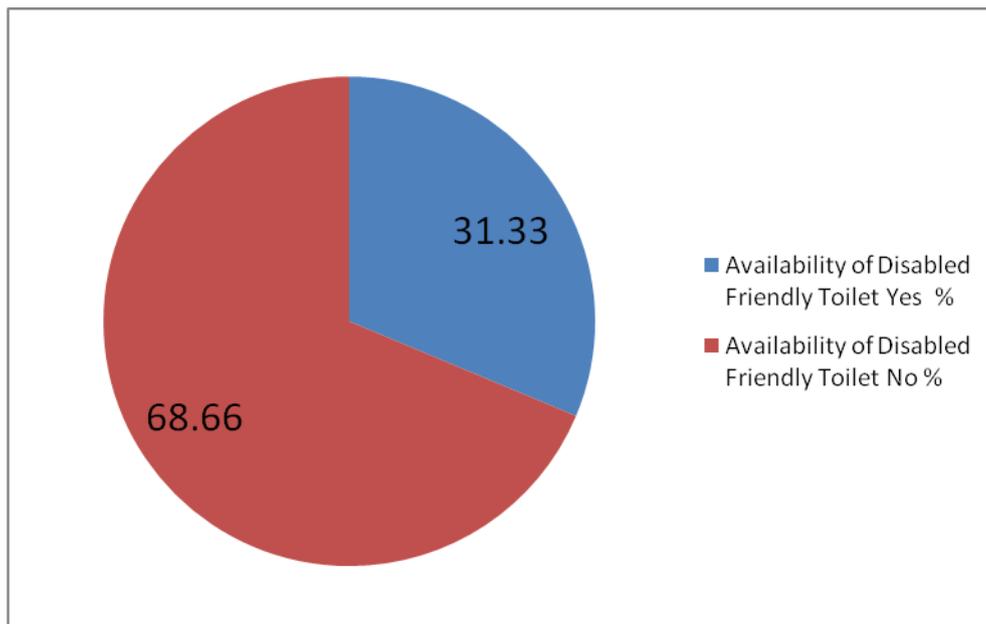
Figure 1. Availability of Ramps and Rails



Disabled Friendly Toilet

Out of the 150 schools only 31.33 percent of schools have the facility of disabled friendly toilet. 68.66 percent of schools did not have such provisions for the disabled.

Figure 2. Availability of Disabled Friendly Toilet



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Other Facilities Provided to the Children with Special Needs

The study results revealed the special initiatives taken up by the schools for improving its facilities so as to that motivate and enable the special need students in coming to the schools and learning in a better way. 48 percent of the schools provided transport facility, 18.7 percent provided escort facility and 14 percent provided additional classes to ensure better learning for the special needs children.

Additional Facilities Required

Regarding the additional facilities required for the schools, 44 percent of the schools suggested that they need adapted toilets, 12.7 percent of schools requested for adapted teaching learning materials, 7.3 percent of schools needed resource rooms, 9.3 schools needed trained special teachers and 8 percent of schools required adapted classrooms.

Teacher Training

The study also looked into the availability of trained teachers in the area of Special Education in the Primary Schools. The study findings show that 54 percent of the teachers' were not trained enough to handle special need students in the primary schools Kerala (Table 2). The agencies like SSA, Institute of Communicative and Cognitive Neuroscience, etc. conducts training programme to the teachers. Majority of the teachers opined that the training programmes conducted by the agencies were not enough to provide quality education to the children with special needs.

Table 2. Availability of Trained Teachers in the area of Special Education in the Primary Schools

Teachers Trained in the area of Special Education	
Trained Teachers %	Untrained Teachers %
46	54

Academic Problems

The teachers raised a number of problems that hinders the academic progress of the special need students. A teacher says that *"They are not able to attend classes daily because of the severity of their disability. Then how can they achieve the desired learning outcomes?"* The teachers opined that there is a need to reduce the curriculum load to improve the academic performances of the students. Teachers' pointed out that absence of trained teachers', aggressive behaviour of the special need children, scarcity of adapted teaching learning materials, absenteeism, inability to read and write, lack of concentration, poor attention span,

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etc. were the major problems associated with handling of special need children in an inclusive environment. One of the teachers opined that *“The major academic problem faced by disabled children is in reading and writing. In our school, teachers’ use adapted Teaching Manual and TLM to overcome this issue. The main social problem they are facing is the poor co-operation in games. In our school we use peer groups to overcome this”*.

The teachers’ stated that the mentally retarded and autism children were very hyperactive and they are not able to sit in class continuously for a bare minimum of one minute. They are in need of behavioural therapy. A teacher says *“Sometimes they show isolation and loss their confidence that affect their study. Lack of teaching learning materials according to their level is a problem. We can reduce this problem through adaptive teaching learning materials and correct guidance”*. Another teacher says *“the students show isolation and aggressive behaviour. So they do not participate in the academic activities. We solve these problems through peer learning and attractive teaching learning materials”*. A teacher says *“We couldn’t give personal attention to all of these children due to the overcrowded classroom. So we want a full time resource teacher and a classroom”*.

Teachers help the children in extracurricular activities such as crafting, drawing, drama, etc. A teacher opined that a single teacher cannot include them in all the activities in a crowded classroom. They need more help from teachers who are trained in this area. A teacher says *“They are very poor in academic level. They are not active in the classroom. They cannot share their feelings in classroom. We must include some activities for disabled children in our curriculum”*. Almost all the teachers’ opined that the special need students were not able to follow the syllabus and can’t take part in all the learning activities as the normal children. A teacher says *“disabled students face academic problems and for its solution we need adapted learning materials and assistive technologies. They also have emotional problems. Help from the special teachers and awareness programmes for parents are necessary for solving it”*.

Efforts of Teachers to Solve Academic Problems

A teacher says *“We have a boy who is partially blind studying in fourth standard. He faces difficulty in reading textbooks and also reading from black board. We allow him to sit in the front bench and also give special attention to him”*. The teachers’ use adapted teaching learning materials, manual method, maximum use of attractive teaching learning materials, peer learning technique, etc. In order to develop reading and writing skills among special need children the teachers provide reading material kit, picture reading and special reading materials, copying alphabets and words and engage them in different activities.

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Social Problems

The teachers' expressed their inability to handle the Mentally Retarded (MR) children. The teachers expressed that the MR children shows behaviour problems and they sometimes make harms to others. They stretched out the things like pen, books, box, etc. They would not allow others to study. A teacher says *"when the teacher is involved in classroom activities, disabled children disturb the students or teachers. If the teacher gives special attention to these children the majority of the students in the class starts speaking and thereby disturb the discipline of the class"*. Teachers pointed out that most of the time the normal students were not ready to mingle with the disabled students and hence, the special need students were not ready to come forward. The teachers said that they design the activities or programmes in such way to ensure the participation of them. Teachers said that some of the students were introvert and they always preferred sitting in isolation. However, the teachers encourage them to participate in play activities and also in group works.

A teacher says *"They cannot participate in all academic activities in all subjects. Sometimes they show several types of behavioural problems that teachers can't solve in a particular period of the class"*. Another teacher added that *"The special need students are very poor in academic activities. They are not active in the classrooms. They cannot share their feelings in classroom. We must include some activities for disabled children in our curriculum"*.

Keeping in view the conditions of the special need students, the teachers provided opportunities to the students to play in outdoors, arrange special classes on motivation, remedial teaching programme and also counselling programmes for the students. Teachers opined that parents can play a pivotal role in the education and socialisation of the children. Hence, they arranged awareness and counselling programmes for them also.

Advantages of Mainstreaming the Disabled Children

The teachers' opined that the disabled children get good experiences when they mingled with the normal children that in turn help them in developing their appearance, social skills and behaviour. A teacher says *"It is good to include the disabled children into main stream schools because these children get easily motivated from other children. These children try to become something among the other children"*.

Parental Support

Most of the teachers expressed that the parents are very cooperative in sending their wards to the school. Some of the parents accompany the children and find time to discuss with teachers about the progress of their children at least twice in a week. A teacher says *"Parents visits school and discuss about the progress of their children. They were keen to know about*

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the day to day activities of their children. Most of the parents provide support to the education of their wards especially in doing home works". The parents are open-minded and they share all the problems of their children with the teachers. A teacher says "Parents play a good role to support the teachers in their overall development. They bring their children for remedial teaching and BRC therapy. They also attend the parental awareness programmes conducted under SSA". Another teacher stated that some of the parents helped the teachers in preparing adapted teaching learning materials. Also, parents helped their children to do home works. It helped the teachers in completing their syllabus easily. Regarding the parental support, a teacher said that the parents took their children to special classes conducted by SSA on Saturdays and specific days. The parents' extent their support by active involvement in various programmes conducted by the school, shared the views and problems related to the education of their special need students. A teacher says "Some are supporting others are not. One or two parents are not accepting that their children are disabled and they are not attending medical camps by SSA". Teachers pointed out that some parents did not provide opportunity for exposure to the society to their disabled children.

Conclusion and Suggestions

The study findings reveal that low vision, mentally retardation and learning disability are the most common disabilities among the primary school students in Kerala. Most of the primary schools have disabled friendly toilets and ramps and rails. All most all the teachers agreed to the necessity of mainstreaming the disabled students in developing their intellectual, social, emotional and vocational skills. The teachers pointed out the indiscipline problems as well as the students' difficulty in following the syllabus.

In view of the challenges faced during the implementation of inclusive education, teachers' suggested the following for the improvement of the inclusive education in Kerala

- Appoint a special teacher in each school and conducts more training programmes to the teachers.
- Improve facilities in the school and make sure adapted curriculum
- Teachers should give special attention to CWSN children. CWSN may be given opportunities to participate in all the classroom activities along with normal children.
- Teachers in schools along with parents at home should together try to identify and understand the limitations of the learner and help them to overcome the difficulties.
- Special schools may be more effective for them as they get many conveniences there like well trained teachers, physical facilities, medical aid, etc. In general schools teachers care the children but they do not get enough time to care special need students.
- It is necessary to ensure the presence of resource teachers and special need students' friendly classrooms.

- In order to increase the enrolment of special need students in the schools, parental awareness programmes and survey may be conducted. Adaptation in the lesson plan can help to achieve quality education to these children. In addition to the resource teacher, a trained teacher in the area of special education may be appointed if a school has more number of special need children.
- Barrier free environment, smart classrooms, adapted TLM and assistive technologies are necessary for the success of inclusive education.
- Special training should be given to the special need children to improve their socialization skills. The team work of teachers, IEDC Resource teachers and peer groups can play important role in it.
- Teachers' should be trained in the area of classroom management to deal with special need students in the classrooms.
- Teachers and parents may be trained in recent trends in dealing with special needs children.
- Facilities for speech therapy and physiotherapy may be extended to the schools at least once in a week.
- Curriculum adaptation, disabled friendly activities and use of ICT are essential for the success of inclusive education
- Provide adapted workbooks and textbooks, resource teachers and individual attention are necessary for ensuring quality education to the special need students.
- Conduct more remedial teaching classes to the students
- Children's with special needs may be enrolled in schools only if all the facilities and efficient support of teachers are there.
- There are so many disabled children enrolled in schools. Most of the time teachers get only half day training in inclusive education. It is not enough for a general teacher to handle the children. Hence, the more training programmes in a long term basis are needed.
- More funds to the school may be allocated where more number of disabled children is there.
- Co-curricular activities give valuable learning experiences for many children with special needs. Teachers and peer group should encourage them to participate in art, craft and sports activities conducts by in and outside the school.
- Adapted smart classroom is necessary in all schools and it should be effectively used under the guidance of resource teachers. They may get opportunity to learn systematically with adapted TLMs. It may help the students to remove the feeling of disability.
- Care may be taken to develop pre- vocational skills in CWSN for making them earning citizens in future.
- Social surveys and home visits may be conducted at regular intervals to enrol more students in schools.

- It is necessary to identify individual abilities of each special need student and develop their skills. We should also engage them in some leisure time activities like gardening, vegetable planting, watering plants. etc.

It was concluded that combined effort of teachers, parents, resource teachers, peer group, parents and therapists for the success of inclusive education. In addition, adapted teaching learning materials, assistive technology and resource teachers are necessary for the proper implementation of inclusive education.

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