Structural Barriers in Implementing Inclusive Education for Children with Special Needs: A Qualitative Approach Towards Zero Rejection

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Abstract:

Inclusive education can be referred as the opportunity towards building an inclusive society for a diverse group of learners. The process of inclusion requires building the right environment to strengthen the capacities of the learners with special educational needs, regardless of their difficulties or differences. Inclusive schools must be acquainted with the diverse needs of the students, ensuring quality education through a flexible curriculum, organizational arrangements and teaching strategies. The Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education also recommended that inclusive education should provide the best opportunity for the majority of children with disabilities to receive education in urban as well as rural areas. There is an emergent need of policy implementation, to prepare the school system for inclusive education, with an intension that all children have the right to attend school in a least restrictive environment and the responsibility of the school is to accommodate differences among children with special needs . An attempt has been made in this paper to justify the problems in implementation of inclusive education due to the structural barriers of school environment.

Keywords: *Structural Barriers, Inclusive Education, Children with Special Needs, Zero Rejection.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Inclusive education is a broader concept, lack of understanding for inclusive education creates barrier to inclusion. To make education system more inclusive, it is required to shift the excluded children into current educational settings by providing the best possible learning environment for all children (Berlach & Chambers, 2011). It can be done by transforming educational systems rather than changing children to fit within current systems using a barrier free environment. Barrier Free Environment enables children with disabilities to move safely and independently in the learning environment. The goal of barrier free design is to provide an environment that supports the independent functioning of individuals so that they can get to, and participate without or with minimal assistance (in case of profound categories) in day-to-day activities including community living, employment, and leisure time activities. "Provisions under Chapter V of PWD Act ensure that every child with a disability has access to free education in an appropriate and inclusive environment till he attains the age of eighteen years" (Kaur,2013).The majority of government and private schools are physically inaccessible to the learners, since most schools are not equipped to act in response to learners with special needs with respect to accessibility. Barriers to access in general include buildings without ramps and elevators, lack of tactile paths and surfaces, lack of multi-sensory instruction etc. (UNESCO,2009 & 2010)The physical barriers restrict mobility including transportation, public places, educational building etc. So in the present scenario it is required to prepare an accessible environment for learners with special needs.

Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (2000,2009) has adopted a more expansive and a broad-based understanding of the concept of inclusion, wherein a multi-option model of educating learner with special needs is being implemented. Hence, SSA has adopted a zero rejection policy which ensures that no child having special needs should be deprived of the right to education and accessible learning environment. To fulfill these objectives of the Zero rejection policy SSA has developed several norms for the barrier free environment including the ramp, doors, windows , signage's in print and Braille, disable friendly toilets and other architectural facilities.

II. KEY TERMS USED IN THE PRESENT STUDY

- Structural Barriers: The physical environmental by the virtue of which a person with disability is unable to access the architectural resources to fulfill his/her needs.

- Inclusive Education: Inclusive education means where all students are equivalent in the process of learning irrespective of their specific condition of disability.

- Children with Special Needs (CWSNs): Children under 6-14 years of age group and who require special educational modification for the process of teaching and learning.

- Zero Rejection: A policy where no child will be left behind in terms of education.

III. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- To study structural barriers in context of inclusive education.

- To check the status of barrier free environment in schools of SSA project using the checklist based on the norms of SSA.

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IV. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The present study focused on the structural barriers in successful implementation of inclusive education in government school, moreover, the study is qualitative in nature. The descriptive survey method has been used in this study to obtain the information of structural barrier in the school system of the government schools who follows the norms of Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan.

V. SAMPLE

The sample of the study consists of ten government primary and upper primary school of Varanasi city area following the norms of sarva shiksha abhiyan of Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh. The school environment is assessed with the permission of school administration.

VI. TOOL

A checklist is prepared by the researcher herself to assess the physical barrier in inclusion of children with special need. The checklist consist of 15 items based on the norms of the SSA having seven basic parameters i.e. (a) Construction of the doors, (b)) Construction of the windows, (c) Ramps, (d) Stairs and railings, (e) Disable friendly toilets and Water Outlet (f) Light, Ventilation and Classroom organization and (g) other facilities like signage's in print and Braille etc.

VII. COLLECTION OF DATA

Having the above mentioned checklist, the investigator visited various schools which were taken as sample. Every section of the school was observed and marked over the checklist. Apart from self-observation the investigator also took help from the school personnel in order to collect data. The scores of the checklist were given on the basis of availability of the resources present in the school. Almost every school personnel were cooperative enough and supported investigator thoroughly to collect the data.

VIII. ADMINISTRATION AND SCORING OF TOOL

The investigator herself has observed the physical barriers of the school qualitatively and tick the appropriate box of the checklist. The investigator visited to those school which are selected for the study. There are two response options in the checklist either "yes" or "No". Furthermore Yes response is bifurcated into three subcategory i.e. well maintained, maintained and poorly maintained respectively. Therefore it was self- observatory checklist which had been administrated by investigator herself.

IX. ANALYSIS OF DATA

The analysis of data for physical barrier observed by researcher was done qualitatively, the data is represented in form of percentage only (Table-1).

Table-1: Dimension of Structural Barriers

S. #	Structural Barrier	Availability				
		Available	Not Available	If Available		
				Well Maintained	Maintained	Poorly Maintained
a.	Structure of Doors • The path from the gate to the school buildings and playground is clearly leveled. • All entrances and doorways in the school building are between 4' to 5' feet wide.	100%	-	80%	10%	10%
b.	Structure of Window • Natural lighting is optimized. • There are enough windows for proper ventilation and lighting.	100%	-	70%	20%	10%
c.	Ramp • All the surfaces are non-slip and loose gravels are avoided. • Sharp turns are avoided in the walkways.	100%	-	50%	20%	30%
d.	Stairs and Railings • Steps are of equal and even heights • The ends of the handrails are bent downwards to avoid injury. • Guard rails are in a situations where there is a sudden change in the level of height including stairs.	40%	60%	25%	50%	25%
e.	Disable friendly toilet and Water Outlet • The toilet inside the school are accessible to CWSN and fitted with commode and grab-rails. • The drinking water outlet are accessible to CWSN.	40%	60%	20%	30%	50%
f.	Light, Ventilation and Classroom Structure • Natural lighting is optimized • Safety of all children is ensured under the provision of hazard free environment. • The school/ classroom design allows the teacher to be able to pay personal attention to the child	100%	-	80%	20%	-
g.	Other Facilities • Bright colours (preferably yellow) are used at every change in slope, at the beginning and ending of a staircase for easy recognition. • All signage's are in print, visuals and Braille at the readable height (min 3 ft) of the children.	30%	70%	-	30%	-

a. Structure of Doors:

This section includes the width, space at pull side, height of handle, force needed to open the door, width of doorway, nature of threshold, doors with proper equipment space at door, etc. Out of ten schools, eight schools have Well Maintained doors as expected by the researcher; one school have maintained door and one school have poorly developed doors. They needed much force to open as well as noisy in nature. The door needed maintenance as oil, repairing or replacement. During study, Out of ten schools, all the ten schools had proper width of door at entrance, for proper entrance of wheel chair.As it is suggested by Stain, (1972)entrances ramped or should be on ground level, doors should be wide enough for wheelchairs .
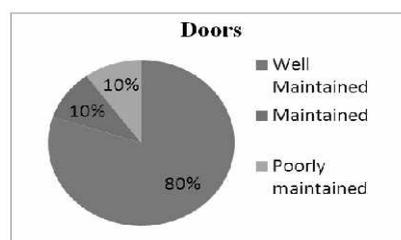

Figure:1 Structure of Doors

b. Structure of Window:

This section includes the window condition, outside opening, height of handle, force needed to open the door, width of window, nature of window with proper equipment space at door, etc. Out of ten schools seven schools have well maintained window, which opens outside, while 20% window is in maintained condition and rest 10% school have poorly developed window. There is a still poor condition of ventilation in the school setup, also the sharp edges wasn't avoided.
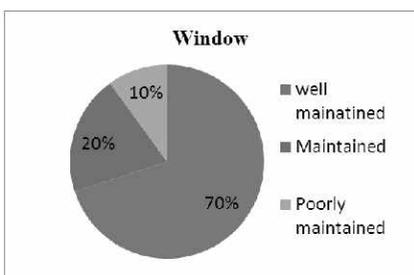

Figure:2 Structure of Windows

c. Ramps:

This section deals with all about the ramps like width, height, nature, inclination, stairs along with ramps, hand railing, slop of ramps, slippery or non- slippery etc. Out of ten schools, five schools have ramps but not as per the expectations of the researcher, where five schools have no proper ramps or poor maintained ramps facility. They were not in such conditions as expected by the researcher
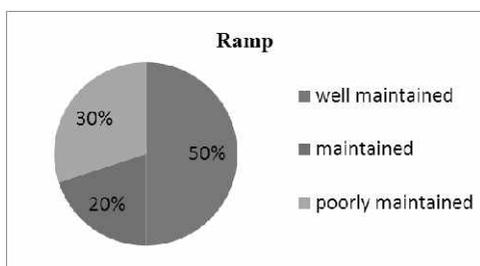

Figure :3 Ramps

d. Stair and Railings:

The subtheme enquires about stair, nature of the travel path whether it is slip- resistant or not, width of stair route, accessibility and barrier, whether it is there or not. The researcher visited ten schools out of which eight schools were found with stair with railing wherever it is required as most of the schools have only ground floors. While two schools have well maintained Stair with Railing and rest two school have poorly maintained Stair with Railing.
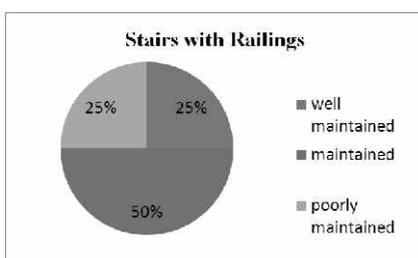

Figure 4 Status of Stair and railings\

e. Disable friendly Toilets and Water Outlets :

This section includes conditions of toilet and water outlets and their relevance with the need of children with special need. It basically covers the area the tap, surface and sanitation inside the toilets and Water outlets. Out of ten schools five schools have proper toilet and water outlets (but not found in a good condition). Three schools have poorly developed toilet, while two schools have no toilet even for differently able .
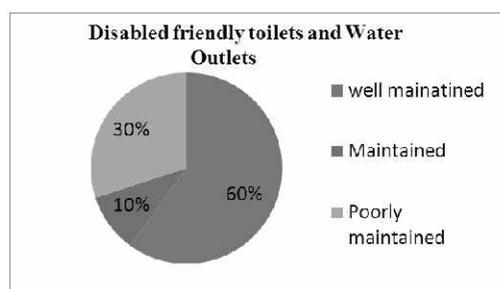

Figure :5 Disabled friendly toilets and Water Outlets

f. Light, ventilation and Classroom Environment:

This section includes space inside the room, window opening inward or outward, pictograms used, light facilities, use of electronic appliances, whether airy or not, pathways inside the room for proper movement. All the aspects have been included in it. Out of ten schools almost every school have proper facilities like well space, light, air, enough space inside the rooms. Eight schools have well developed light and ventilation facility while ventilation facility of two schools is in maintained condition.
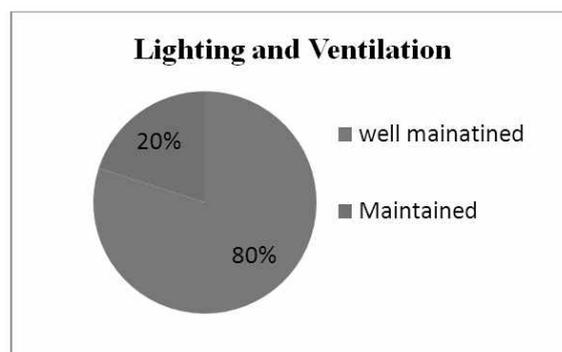

Figure: 6 Light, ventilation and Classroom Environment

g. Other Facilities:

The symbols/ signage's was available in print format only , none of the schools having signages in Braille format. So the schools are not so friendly with respect to children with visual impairment. Although the bright colours like yellow, green were used in almost all the school but not as expectations of the researcher.

X. FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

Out of ten schools, eight schools have well maintained doors as expected by the researcher. The door needed maintenance as oil, repairing or replacement as the doors were noisy in nature, windows were in poor condition of ventilation and

the sharp edges wasn't avoided. Out of five schools have no proper ramps or poor maintained ramps facility. Most of the schools are on the ground floor while two schools have well maintained Stair with Railing and rest two school have poorly maintained Stair with Railing. Out of ten schools five schools have proper toilet and water outlets (but not found in a good condition). Three schools have poorly developed toilet, while two schools have no toilet even for differently able .Almost every school have proper facilities like well space, light, air, enough space inside the rooms. Eight schools have well developed light and ventilation facility while ventilation facility of two schools is in maintained condition. The symbols/ signage's was available in print format only , none of the schools having signage's in Braille format. So the schools are not so friendly with respect to children with visual impairment. Although the bright colours like yellow, green were used in almost all the school but not as expectations of the researcher.

XI. CONCLUSION

Our census rarely has disability related questions and most families prefer not to reveal data. It is required to aware and sensitize the education system and society using inclusive practices together with barrier free access. An important step has to be taken at school level to train teachers and support staff, to meet the needs of inclusive education.. In this regard educational institutions should follow a holistic approach of practicing inclusive education. The school administration should provide a barrier-free environment following the principles of universal design, to enable the children with special needs to study in a regular classroom. To provide easier access to children with special needs school premises, it is compulsory to remove architectural barriers or to modify existing facilities within the school environment. Therefore, at present it is required to understand the problems in the educational system and to provide barrier free access to ensure that every child learns. As good quality education is a basic prerequisite to ensure sustainable rehabilitation and the hope of a better future.

XII. IMPLICATIONS

The study has a wide range of implications. They are as below:

• The study can be performed over a large number of schools and help it to improve the current situation for further inclusion of students with disability.

• The study will help in identifying the major problems related to structural barriers in school environment to promote and to maximize the least restrictive or barrier free environment for better inclusion.

• This study is useful dimension in the field of inclusive education as well as universal design for better learning. and barrier free environment can be included in future research.

• The study can be extended to other target groups including parents, school administration and curriculum.

XIII. REFERENCES

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