



Educational Provisions and Availability of Basic Facilities for Children with Special Needs: A Case Study of Himachal Pradesh

Dr. Gourav Mahajan

Assistant Professor, Department of Education, Govt. College Dharamshala

1. Introduction

Diversity is the law of nature. More specifically the students come in the class rooms with diverse needs in many aspects such as race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, gender, learning modalities, cognitive development, social development, and the rate at which they take in and retrieve information. The diversity in the classroom, therefore, does not just refer to cultural diversity but also diversity in skills, knowledge, and needs. It is important to understand these attributes in order to facilitate the learning of such students.

The students having any of various difficulties (such as a physical, emotional, behavioral, or learning disability or impairment) that causes an individual to require additional or specialized instructions is termed as students with diverse needs. They are also called children with special educational needs (CWSN). These students have little motivation to be active participants in learning as they possess the feeling of anxiety and low self-esteem. These students need to be actively engaged in the relevant learning situations that allow them to build and expand their conceptual knowledge and also, provide them the support necessary to develop in them the underlying skills. Use of audio-visual aids while teaching these students can be of great help for these students. The mistakes committed by these students during their learning process must be diagnosed properly to detect their learning needs and plan accordingly.

According to Linda Perlstein (2012) a student from a disadvantaged background or with a mental, emotional, or physical disability who needs individual requirements (as for education) is termed as student with diverse needs.

According to the Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs (SEN) Act 2004 of America the term “special educational needs” is defined as, “a restriction in the capacity of the person to participate in and benefit from education on account of an enduring physical, sensory, mental health or learning disability or any other condition which results in a person learning differently from a person without that condition...”

In India a learner with SEN is defined variously in different documents. For example, a child with SEN in a District Primary Education Programme (DPEP) document is defined as a child with disability, namely, visual, hearing, locomotor, and intellectual (DPEP, 2001).

However, the NCERT-UNESCO regional workshop report titled ‘Assessment of needs for Inclusive Education: Report of the First Regional Workshop for SAARC Countries (2000)’ states that SEN goes beyond physical disability. It also refers to, ... the large proportion of children—in the school age—belonging to the groups of child labour are, street children, victims of natural catastrophes and social conflicts, and those in extreme social and economic deprivation.

According to the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED-97) (UNESCO, 1997), the term Special Needs Education (SNE) means educational intervention and support designed to address SEN

2. Classification of CWSN

CWSN are classified on the basis of different kinds of disability or impairment which include physical, social, mental and emotional. Following are the major types of CWSN.

2.1 Children with Autistic Spectrum Disorders (ASD).

Autism spectrum disorders (ASD) are characterized by social-interaction difficulties, communication challenges and a tendency to engage in repetitive behaviors.

- ***Social interaction***

Children with this spectrum of autism have difficulty establishing and maintaining relationships. They do not respond to many of the non-verbal forms of communication like facial expressions, gestures, and eye contact. They are often unable to understand and express their needs just as they are unable to interpret and understand the needs of others. This impairs their ability to share interests and activities with other people. For this reason they may appear distant and aloof. Because they are often delayed in their speech and struggle to make sense of other non-verbal forms of communication, they may withdraw into repetitive play and behaviour and avoid interaction.

- ***Communication and Language Deficits***

People with autism often have communication difficulties in one form or another. There are some children with autism who speak fluently, others who are speech impaired to varying degrees and others still, who are unable to speak at all. Of those who can speak, they will often use language in a very limited or unusual way. The speech of those who do talk may make repetitions of what people around them have said—and non-contextual speech phrases without any apparent communicative purpose.

- ***Repetitive Behaviors***

Unusual repetitive behaviors and/or a tendency to engage in a restricted range of activities are another core symptom of autism. Common repetitive behaviors include hand-flapping, rocking, jumping and twirling, arranging and rearranging objects, and repeating sounds, words, or phrases.

2.2 Children with Cognition and Learning Disorders.

This may apply not only to children who are seen to have general or specific learning difficulties, but also to children with physical and sensory impairments, and those on the autistic spectrum. It is also acknowledged that some children may have associated sensory, physical and behavioural difficulties which compound their needs.

2.3 Children with Behavioural, Emotional and Social Disorders.

It includes range of children and young people, from those whose behaviour stems from a deep-seated emotional/psychiatric disturbance, to those whose behaviour is more commonly a reaction to outward circumstances. Such difficulties take different forms, including acting out, phobic and withdrawn behaviour. Other common examples include involvement in crime, substance abuse, depression and self-harm.

2.4 Children with Attention Difficulty.

Some students with learning disabilities have difficulties related to focusing, sustaining and shifting attention. These difficulties might result from physical discomfort, emotional issues, interest and motivational factors or from challenges with self regulation. Persistent patterns of difficulties such as inattention, hyperactivity, or impulsivity, or any combination of these, might be the result of a biologically based condition known as Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder. ADHD is a regulatory problem of attention, activity level and impulse control, and it can have a significant impact on a student's ability to learn.

2.5 Children with Writing Disorder.

Writing Disorder (Dysgraphia) is generally characterized by distorted writing in spite of thorough instruction. A student with writing disorder might experience some of the following difficulties:

- inconsistent and sometimes illegible writing; e.g., mixing print and cursive, upper and lower case, irregular sizes, shapes or slant of letters
- inconsistent positioning on the page, with respect to lines and margins
- unfinished words or letters, omitted words and many spelling mistakes
- fine motor difficulty, such as inability to reproduce letters or remembering motor patterns
- inconsistent speed in writing, either extremely laboured or quick
- writing that doesn't communicate at the same level as the student's other language skills.

2.6 Children with Reading Disorder.

Reading Disorder (Dyslexia) is generally characterized by difficulties with the alphabet, word recognition, decoding, spelling, and comprehension. A student with reading disorder might have difficulty with the following:

- naming, learning the sequence of or printing the alphabet
- memorizing non-phonetic words
- reading words that cannot be translated into a mental picture (and, a, the, etc.)

- sound/symbol correspondence, or sequencing of letters to create a word
- reading aloud without repeated mistakes and pauses
- comprehending reading material, grasp of vocabulary
- reading numbers and confusing math symbols
- organizing what he or she wants to say verbally, or not being able to think of the word needed
- retelling a story in sequence of events
- finding a word in the dictionary, naming the days of the week and months of the year.

2.7 Children with Spelling Disorder.

Spelling disorders (Dysorthographia) are generally characterized by difficulties with spelling. They stem from weak awareness or memory of language structures and letters in words. A student with a spelling disorder might present some of the following difficulties, often in conjunction with poor skills in reading and/or arithmetic:

- arbitrary misspellings, such as addition, omission and/or substitution of letters in words
- reversal of vowels and/or syllables
- slow, hesitant or poor written expression • errors in conjugation and grammar
- phonetic spelling of non-phonetic words
- misunderstanding the correspondence between sounds and letters.

2.8 Children with Auditory Processing Disorder.

Auditory processing disorder describes a variety of disorders that affect the way the brain processes or interprets what it hears even though the student might have adequate hearing. A student with an auditory processing disorder might have difficulty with the following:

- listening, particularly where there is background noise or when attention is divided
- processing information if the speaker is speaking quickly
- understanding what is said
- recalling what they have heard or following a sequence of directions
- recognizing and interpreting distinct sounds or attributing meaning to sounds in words
- using phonemes incorrectly when speaking
- applying phonics, encoding (spelling) and decoding (sounding out) words
- reading comprehension, vocabulary and basic literacy.

2.9 Children with Visual Processing Disorder.

A visual perception disorder involves difficulty making sense of what is seen, even though vision is intact. A student with visual processing disorder might find the following tasks challenging:

- recalling and using visual information
- differentiating colours, letters or numbers that are similar
- attending when there is competing visual information
- perceiving distances, depth or movement
- accurately identifying information from books, pictures, charts, graphs and maps
- writing within margins or on lines, or aligning numbers in math problems
- fine motor tasks, such as writing or copying
- tracking and/or reading with speed and precision.

2.10 Children with Orthopedic disability:

A physical disability, such as paralysis, poor muscle control, difficulty with speech production, or the loss of a limb, which limits one's ability to perform daily living activities, is considered an orthopedic impairment. The impairment can be genetic, caused by a disease, or have other causes, like bone fractures or burns.

3. Educational Provisions for CWSN in India: An Overview

Many policies and programmes were started in India post-independence for the upliftment of the marginal section of the society including the persons with disabilities. To provide equal educational opportunities to the children with special needs the provisions have been made in Constitution of India, National Education Policies 1968 and 1986 (revised in 1992).

It is clearly directed in Article 45 of the Constitution that the provision of Universal, Free and Compulsory Education becomes the joint responsibility of the Centre and the States. The Constitution of India had provided equality of opportunity in educational institutions under Article 29(1).

The following provisions have been made for the education of the children with diverse or special needs over the years in India after independence.

The right of every child to education is proclaimed in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) and was strongly reaffirmed by the Jomtien World Declaration of Education for All (1990). Furthermore, the Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities (1993) was an important resolution to improve the educational conditions of persons with disabilities. This had major implications for the Indian situation in the form of three legislative Acts—The Rehabilitation Council of India Act, 1992 (RCI Act), the Persons with Disabilities (Equal Opportunities, Protection of Rights and Full Participation) Act, 1995 (PWD Act), and the National Trust for Welfare of Persons with Autism, Cerebral Palsy, Mental Retardation and Multiple Disabilities Act, 1999.

In 2002 the 86th amendment to the constitution was made, mandating free and compulsory education to all children ages 6-14. The 86th amendment to the constitution, section 21A reads, "The State shall provide free and compulsory education to all children of the age of six to fourteen years in such manner as the State may, by law, determine. With the help of World Bank, Government of India Initiated Sarva Shiksha abhiyan-SSA (Education for All) in India. SSA and its focus on children with special needs (CWSN).

The SSA lists 8 priority areas of intervention for inclusive education:

- Survey for identification of CWSN
- Assessment of CWSN
- Providing assistive devices
- Networking with NGOs/Government schemes
- Barrier free access
- Training of teachers on inclusive education
- Appointment of resource teachers
- Curricula adaptation/textbooks/appropriate teaching learning material (TLM)

In the year of 2009 the Government of India came up with Right to Education Bill which promises free education for every child in the 6-14 age- group.

The Right of children to Free and Compulsory Education Act came into force from April 1, 2010. This is a historic day for the people of India as from this day the right to education have been accorded the same legal status as the right to life as provided by Article 21A of the Indian Constitution. Every child in the age group of 6-14 years, irrespective of their caste, religion, creed, socio economic status and also their special and diverse needs, is to be provided 8 years of elementary education in an age appropriate classroom in the vicinity of his/her neighbourhood.

On 19th April, 2017 a new act came into force- The Rights of Persons with Disabilities (RPWD) Act, 2016 which replaced the existing Persons with Disabilities (Equal Opportunities, Protection of Rights and Full Participation) Act, 1995. The RPWD, 2016 Act aims at ensuring equal opportunities for all the persons with disabilities so that they can lead their lives with dignity and without any discrimination. The Act lays down specific provisions to uphold such rights. In this act the types of disabilities have been increased from 7 (as covered in PWD Act, 1995) to 21.

4, Educational Provisions for CWSN in Himachal Pradesh: An Analysis

The Department of Social Justice and Empowerment, Govt. of Himachal Pradesh is committed to provide equal opportunities, equality, rehabilitation, and education of persons with disabilities (PWDs) in the state. The department in coordination with Health and Family Welfare department, at all levels, is organizing various programmes for the early identification, detection and prevention of disability. These programmes include Survey of PWDs, Pre-natal checkups, Polio immunizations, Blindness Control Programmes etc.

As per the provisions made under Right to Education Act 2009, the state govt. is providing the free and compulsory education to all the children from 6 to 14 years including CWSN. The tuition fee is also exempted for CWSN at secondary and higher secondary levels of school education.

To help CWSN availing opportunities of higher education, the state govt. has reserved 5% seats in all the courses in all the State Universities and other institutes of higher education under Department of Higher Education (DHE).

For the female students with visual impairment and hearing impairment, the state govt. under Social Justice and Empowerment Department, is running an institution at Sundernagar, Distt. Mandi. A similar institute for male students with visual impairment and hearing impairment is running by Himachal Pradesh Council for Child Welfare at Dhalli Distt. Shimla. At these institutes the state govt. is providing free education for visually and hearing impaired students along-with the boarding and lodging facilities.

According to the Annual Report 2019 of Department of Social Justice and Empowerment, Govt. of Himachal Pradesh, the state govt. is providing inclusive education to 12348 students upto the age of 18 years through 6408 govt. schools of the state.

To promote vocational efficiency and to enhance employability of CWSN, the state govt. is providing vocational training courses in different trades to the CWSN.

Some of the major initiatives of the state govt. to facilitate education of CWSN are as below.

4.1 Deendayal Disabled Rehabilitation Scheme (DDRS)

The state govt. has provided financial assistance to the voluntary organisations under Centre sponsored Deendayal Disabled Rehabilitation Scheme of Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, Govt. of India to ensure equal opportunities, equality, empowerment, education and rehabilitation of PWDs.

The details of the amount granted to different voluntary organisations during the years 2018-19 and 2019-20 are as below.

Year	NGO	Purpose	Amount Granted
2018-19	Paradise Children Care Centre, Chowari, Distt Chamba	Special School for Mentally Retarded	Rs. 4,18,097
	Chetan Association, Bilaspur	Special School for Mentally Retarded	Rs. 44,09,496
	Chetan Association, Bilaspur	Community Based Rehabilitation	Rs. 8,31,600
2019-20	Paradise Children Care Centre, Chowari, Distt Chamba	Special School for Mentally Retarded	Rs. 9,81,900
	Chetan Association, Bilaspur	Special School for Mentally Retarded	Rs. 37,17,284

4.2 ASEEM

The state govt. has started a state sponsored scheme named 'A Scheme for Enabling, Empowering and Mainstreaming of Specially-abled' (ASEEM) in the state to help the CWSN in different ways which include:

- Early detection, prevention, screening of disabilities and provision of disability cards
- Programme for awareness generation on disabilities
- Programme for research on disability issues
- Scheme of scholarship to students with disabilities
- Scheme of special education for visually, speech and hearing impaired and mentally challenged children
- Scheme of special education for mentally challenged children /adults
- Scheme of disability rehabilitation centre
- Scheme of employment for PWDs

Under the head 'Scheme of scholarship to students with disabilities' of ASEEM the state govt is providing monthly scholarship to CWSN irrespective of the kind of disability they are having and without considering their family income. The only condition for getting these scholarships is the disabled student should have the certificate of minimum 40% disability issued by the competent authority.

Class/ Course	Amount of Scholarship for Day Scholar student (per month)	Amount of Scholarship for Boarder student (per month)
Class I to V	Rs 625	Rs 1875
Class VI to VIII	Rs 750	Rs 1875
Class IX to X	Rs 950	Rs 1875
Class XI to XII or any Post-matric course of one or two years duration	Rs 1250	Rs 2500
Diploma Course (After 10+2)	Rs 1875	Rs 3750
B.A./B.Sc./B.Com.	Rs 1875	Rs 3750
LLB/B.Ed./M.A./M.Sc./M.Ed. /PG diploma courses after M.A./ M. Sc.	Rs 2250	Rs 3750
B.E. /B.Tech./MBBS	Rs 3750	Rs 5000

Also, the Scheme of special education for visually, speech and hearing impaired children of ASEEM the state govt is providing grants to the voluntary organisations at 90:10 basis to set-up special schools up-to Primary/Secondary level for visually, speech and hearing impaired children.

4.3 Composite Regional Centre

In the year 2001, the state govt set up Composite Regional Centre at Sundernagar Distt Mandi with an intent to provide educational facilities to CWSN. In this respect the Centre is running short term training courses for the teachers working in normal schools, Anganwadi workers, health workers to help them having adequate knowledge for the education of CWSN. In addition, the Centre is also running following long-term courses, approved by Rehabilitation Council of India.

- Diploma in Special Education -Visual Impairment
- Diploma in Special Education -Hearing Impairment
- Diploma in Special Education -Mental Retardation
- Diploma in Special Education – Cerebral Palsy

5. Status of Facilities for CWSN in Himachal Pradesh

The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act (RTE) mandates schools to become child-friendly, inclusive spaces where children from diverse backgrounds can actively participate in learning through child-centered activities. The current mandate of free and compulsory education for all children aged 6-14 years in India is based on the principle of inclusive education. As per the RTE norms, all schools should be barrier free and accessible to children with disabilities. The Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016 also mandates universal access for all children to inclusive schools and calls for making educational buildings, campuses and various facilities accessible to children with disabilities.

Promoting inclusive education begins with creating barrier-free and child-centered inclusive schools where every child enjoys her or his rights on an equal basis. The school shall provide proper facilities like, ramps in toilets and at entry/exit points for wheelchair users and auditory signals in elevators / lifts and other possible infrastructural facilities in accordance with the provisions laid down in RPWD Act- 2016.

In the following sections the data is presented with respect to the availability of ramps and CWSN friendly toilets in the schools of Himachal Pradesh.

5.1 Availability of Ramps and Ramps with Handrails for CWSN

Year	Total Govt schools	Total Private schools	No. of Govt. Schools with Ramp (%)	No. of Private Schools with Ramp (%)	No. of Govt Schools having Ramps with Handrail (%)	No. of Private Schools having Ramps with Handrail (%)
2018-19	15433	2778	11859 (76.84)	396 (14.25)	9545 (61.85)	273 (9.83)

2019-20	15398	2786	12329 (80.07)	424 (15.22)	10035 (65.17)	287 (10.3)
2020-21	15391	2753	12805 (83.2)	477 (17.33)	10588 (68.79)	316 (11.48)
2021-22	15380	2646	13402 (87.1)	585 (22.1)	11374 (74)	433 (16.4)
2022-23	15447	2613	13378 (86.6)	583 (22.3)	11481 (74.3)	427 (16.3)
2023-24	15217	2607	14280 (93.8)	698 (26.8)	12380 (81.4)	513 (19.7)

Above table shows the number of schools including primary, upper primary, secondary, and higher secondary in state with the availability of ramps over the four years i.e. from the session 2018-19 to 2021-22.

Total number of schools in the state in the session 2018-19 were 18211 out of which the govt. schools were 15433 and the private schools were 2778. Out of 15433 govt. schools 11859 schools (76.84 %) were having the facility of ramps for CWSN. Further, 9545 of these schools (61.85 %) were having ramps with the handrails. The steady increase has been observed in the state-owned schools with respect to availability of ramps and ramps with handrails over the four years. The percentage of govt. schools with the availability of ramps during the sessions 2019-20 and 2020-21 is found to be 80.07 % and 83.2 % respectively. Out of these schools, 65.17 % and 68.79 % schools were having the facility of ramps with handrails during the session 2019-20 and 2020-21 respectively. During the session 2021-22 the number govt. schools with ramps increases to 13042 (87.1 %) while the number of such schools with the availability of ramps with handrails increases to 11374 (74 %). It is clear from above data that by the year 2022, about 13 % of the govt. schools still lack the availability of ramps while the percentage of schools without ramps with handrails is about 26 %.

In comparison to the govt. schools, majority of the private schools in the state do not have the facility of ramps and ramps with handrails. In the year 2019, only 396 private schools (14 %) out of total 2778 were having the facility of ramps for CWSN while only 273 (9 %) such schools had the availability of ramps with handrails. There is significant improvement in the government schools of the state with respect to availability of ramps and ramps with handrails for CWSN. By the year 2024 about 94% of the govt. schools have the facility of ramps in the campus for CWSN while the private of schools are fail to provide such facilities to CWSN as only 27 % of them are equipped with the ramps. It reveals that about 80 % of private schools in the state are without the facility of ramps and ramps with handrails.

5.2 Availability CWSN friendly toilets

Year	Total Govt Schools	Total Private Schools	No. of Govt. Schools with the Availability of CWSN friendly Toilets (%)	No. of Private Schools with the Availability of CWSN friendly Toilets (%)	No. of Govt. Schools with the Availability of Functional CWSN friendly Toilets (%)	No. of Private Schools with the Availability of Functional CWSN friendly Toilets (%)
2018-19	15433	2778	3248 (21.05)	908 (32.69)	3122 (20.23)	889 (32)
2019-20	15398	2786	3292 (21.38)	913 (32.77)	3167 (20.57)	893 (32.05)
2020-21	15391	2753	3325 (21.6)	918 (33.35)	3202 (20.8)	898 (32.62)
2021-22	15380	2646	3353 (21.8)	884 (33.4)	3217 (20.9)	861 (32.5)
2022-23	15447	2613	3423 (22.2)	874 (33.4)	3282 (24.2)	851 (35)
2023-24	15217	2607	3848 (25.3)	950 (36.4)	3676 (24.2)	912 (35)

It is clear from above table that very few schools in the state, both govt. and private, have CWSN friendly toilets. By the year 2024, only 25.3 % of govt. schools and 36.4 % of private schools have had the CWSN friendly toilets. Surprisingly, all these CWSN friendly toilets are not even functional. In govt. schools only 24.29% whereas in private schools 35 % CWSN friendly toilets are functional only.

6. Conclusion

To conclude, both the govt. schools as well as the private schools need to improve the basic facilities for CWSN to make the physical environment of the school barrier free and CWSN friendly. The analysis of the data reveals that the private schools of the state must put sincere efforts to generate the basic

facilities as the percentage of the private schools with the availability of ramps, ramps with handrails and the CWSN friendly toilets are negligible. The govt. should provide necessary instructions to the managements of private schools of the state to ensure the availability of the basic infrastructure facilities in their schools for CWSN in a stipulated time.

Also, the govt. schools of the state should accelerate the efforts to provide the facility of ramps, ramps with handrails and CWSN friendly toilets in all the govt. schools of the state to fulfill the aim of provision of basic facilities in all the state-owned schools. Where there is availability of CWSN friendly toilets but they are non-functional efforts must be made to make them functional so that the CWSN in such schools may get benefitted.

To provide CWSN friendly toilet is the prime responsibility of the schools. The availability of CWSN friendly toilets will create a supportive environment in the schools for CWSN. The access to such toilets will enhance the adjustability of CWSN learners in the schools and it will further increase their learning efficiency.

All the stakeholders must put sincere efforts to provide the best possible facilities to the CWSN for which the funds are raised by the central govt. as well as the state govts under different schemes and programs. Having these facilities in the school premises is the right of CWSN given to them by RTE Act, 2009 and RPWD Act, 2016, therefore, they cannot be deprived of all those facilities for which they have the legal right.

The aim of 'Education for All' will be realized only when the CWSN will be provided the barrier-free access to education institutes. Therefore, in addition to the availability of the basic facilities of ramps with handrail and the CWSN friendly toilets, micro-level planning is also needed to ensure the availability of the equipment and assistive technologies in accordance with the need and demand of the kinds of CWSN admitted in an individual school.

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