

Factors Influencing the Accessibility of Education for Children with Disabilities in India

Sandhya Limaye
Tata Institute of Social Sciences, India

Abstract

The Central and State governments in India have formulated programs and policies over the years for children with disabilities in order to help them to enter mainstream society. However, despite these policies, children with disabilities are amongst the most disadvantaged in terms of access to schooling and completion of elementary education, as their needs are not met effectively. Based on my personal experiences, research, and communication with different stakeholders involved in the field of education for children with disabilities over the last 30 years, this paper explores the broader challenges in the current education system with respect to issues of quality of education and drop-out rates of primary students with disabilities. A number of factors that influence the accessibility of education for children with disabilities are presented including: perceptions of parents of children with disabilities and their difficulties in helping their children with disabilities, the general attitude of society, government officials, school staff and infrastructure, inadequate levels of training of key stakeholders, invisibility of disability in community, poverty, lack of acceptance, lack of interest, gender discrimination, lack of awareness, poor physical access, availability of various support systems, and government policies focusing on the education of children with disabilities in specific.

Keywords

India, education, educational policy, children with disabilities

Introduction

Education is a right of every child whether she/he is disabled or non-disabled as education equips children to meet the challenges of the life. Education involves growing up knowing the environment in which we live in. It is a human right with immense power to transform the environment in which we live, as it is a powerful instrument of social change and often initiates upward movement in the social structure. In order to make education for all a reality, every child must have access to quality education. The UNESCO Convention against Discrimination in

Education (1960) and other international human rights treaties like the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1946), Convention on the Rights of Child (1989), and UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006) prohibit any sort of exclusion from educational opportunities on the basis of sex, ethnic origin, language, religion, nationality, socio-economic

Corresponding Author:

Sandhya Limaye, Center For Disability Studies and Action, School of Social Work, Tata Institute of Social Sciences, V.N. Purav Marg, Deonar, Mumbai, Maharashtra 400088, India
Email: limaye.sandhya@gmail.com

conditions, abilities etc. However, millions of children continue to experience exclusion within (and from) education systems across the world.

The educational scene in India has undergone major change over the years due to efforts of the government, resulting in the better provision of education. In the context of India's changing educational landscape, it is important to look at education for children with disabilities critically. This paper is based on my personal experiences, research, and communication with different stakeholders involved in the field of education for children with disabilities over the last 30 years.

Status of Education of Children with Disabilities

According to Census 2011, there are 1.2 billion people in India, of which about 833 million people live in rural areas. The total number of children with disabilities is 164.5 million.

According to the National Sample Survey (NSS) 58th round (Jul.–Dec. 2002), 25 percent of the literate population of people with disabilities had received education up to the primary level (five years of schooling), and 11 percent up to the middle level (eight years), while a mere 9 percent had nine or more years. Interestingly, enrolment ratios for those with disabilities aged 5 to 18 years in a mainstream school were higher in rural areas than in urban areas. Education for children with disabilities in India suffers either in its efficacy, infrastructure, implementation and/or other causes and it is very difficult to find reliable data about the prevalence of disability in India (<https://targetstudy.com/articles/education-of-disabled-children-in-india.html>).

Schooling for students with disabilities in India is conducted in regular schools or in special schools. The special school was introduced in India in the last two decades of the 19th century by Christian missionaries. Special schools are equipped with the resources to

provide education to children with disabilities, and many special schools are concentrated in urban areas. Because of the widespread belief that children with disabilities cannot be educated alongside other children, the schools, the special education system was segregated. These schools helped to provide education for children with disabilities, but did not help them to enter mainstream society (<https://targetstudy.com/articles/education-of-disabled-children-in-india.html>). Furthermore, this special school system has major drawbacks – it is expensive and has only limited reach. In spite of the disadvantages of the special schools and the impact on the lives of the children with disabilities studying in them, the law still provides for setting up of these schools for children with disabilities. Ministry of Welfare (now Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment) has launched a plan for the establishment of special schools and provides grants to them to run the schools. Priority under the scheme is to set up schools in districts where there is no special school at present. At present 240 odd districts in the country have no special schools (Baquer & Sharma, 2006). Presently there are about 3000 special schools servicing children with different disabilities. It is estimated that there are 900 schools for the hearing impaired, 400 schools for the visually impaired, 1,000 for the mentally retarded and 700 for the physically disabled children (Bagga, 2007). These schools are registered with the Rehabilitation Council of India and are allowed to apply for government support. This small number of special schools cannot serve the whole population of students with disabilities (Byrd, 2010).

Zacharia (2000) noted that the philosophy of “integration” emerged which advocated education of children with mild and moderate disabilities in general schools along with others with adequate resource support. But the children under integration method were still treated separately in schools and integration was only

partial. This led to the emergence of the new concept called Inclusive Education (IE) which argues that all children irrespective of the nature and degree of the disability should be educated in general schools with non-disabled children. It has been introduced in the schools but a lot more has yet to be done (Zacharia, 2000). While few professionals would question the appropriateness of including students with disabilities in a regular school, there is a debate about which students should be part of general education classes and how much time they should spend there (Lal, 2005 p. 79). More recently, there has been growing awareness regarding issues of access and enrolment of the children with disabilities into the mainstream for their integration into society. Integrated or inclusive schools are public schools that allow students with disabilities to attend, but these schools provide limited support for these students. Considering the difficulties of accessing special schools, regular local neighborhood schools become viable options open for most children.

A vast majority of children with disabilities in India are not getting an appropriate education. Therefore, special measures have been taken by the Government of India expecting the states to take responsibilities to ensure that within a specified time frame every child, whatever his/her disability, has access to formal or non-formal education. The Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) is an Indian government programme aimed at the universalization of elementary education in a time bound manner, as mandated by the 86th amendment to the Constitution of India making the free and compulsory education of children between the ages of 6 to 14 a fundamental right. There are government efforts through Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) teachers to identify students with disabilities who never enrolled in the school or who drop out and provide education for them. It is estimated that India has

approximately 35 million children with disabilities but less than one percent have access to appropriate education (Baquer & Sharma, 2006).

Education of children with disabilities (CWD) has been a part of policy development in India for the past few decades. The policies of the government of India towards the education of children with disabilities have been reflected in the enactments, schemes and through institutions established for various relevant activities.

Policy Framework for Education for Children With Disabilities

India is bound by human rights treaties like the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1946), the UNESCO Convention against Discrimination in Education (1960), and Convention on the Rights of Child (1989). International policies, related to disability and education such as the UN Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities (1993), the Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Disability Education (1994), United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disability 2006, BIWAKO Framework, have influenced Indian policies on education for children with disabilities. The drafting of the new bill for Person with Disabilities Act, (PWD) 2011 which replaced the Persons with Disabilities Act, 1995, is being implemented to fulfill obligations under international treaties and to overcome limitations of the previous Act. The bill of 2014 and the on-going amendment of the National Trust Act and the policy for guardianship that may extend from offering “limited guardianship” to the formation of new support systems are products of this. All these enable persons with disabilities to make decisions and enhance their self-determination. The bill of 2014 promoted the goals of an inclusive, barrier-free and rights-based society for persons with disabilities.

The Indian Constitution prohibits any exclusion from educational opportunities on the basis of sex, ethnic origin, language, religion, nationality, socio-economic conditions, abilities, etc. The Preamble of the Constitution embodies the concept of social justice and equality of status and opportunity to all the people of India. Article 45 of the Indian Constitution provides compulsory and free education of all children below 14 years and the 86th amendment of the Constitution Act in 2002 made it clear that education is a fundamental right of every child between the age group of 6 to 14 years.

Focused Efforts to Improve Education for Children With Disabilities

Since independence of 15th August 1947, several efforts have been made to take education closer to children with disabilities.

The Kothari Commission of 1964 stressed the education of children with disabilities (irrespective of the type of disability) being a part of the general education system. The National Education Policy in 1968 based on Kothari Commission recommendations, suggested expanding educational facilities for children with physically and mentally disabilities. In 1986, the National Policy on Education brought the fundamental issue of equity center stage. Sector 4.9 of this policy focused clearly on the needs of children with disabilities. This policy also included a provision regarding teacher training for all mainstream education teachers by “ including a compulsory special education component in pre-service training of general teachers” (Kohama, 2012:19)

In 1974, the Ministry of Welfare started the Integrated Education of Disabled Children (IEDC) to promote the integration and retention in regular school systems of students with mild and moderate disabilities. However, the program fell short of its objectives due to various reasons such as a dearth of adequately trained educators, equipment and educational material, coordination among various departments, etc.

In 1987, UNICEF and the government-funded National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) launched the Project on Integrated Education for Disabled (PIED) that focused on teacher training in order to encourage integration. PIED was later amalgamated with the District Primary Education Program (DPEP) and Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA). The enrolment and retention rates spiked, however, the coverage was minimal and only two to three percent of children with disabilities were integrated into regular schools.

In 1992, the Plan of Action (POA) suggested that the children with disabilities who can be educated in a regular school should not be admitted to a special school. Even children who were initially admitted to special schools for training in plus curriculum skills should be transferred to general schools once they acquire daily living skills, communication skills, and basic academic skills. This POA was strengthened by the enactment of Rehabilitation Council of India (RCI) Act 1992. The main objectives of this Act were to establish a statutory mechanism for monitoring and standardizing courses for the training of 16 categories of professionals required in the field of special education and rehabilitation of persons with disabilities. Training of special educators and resource teachers that can offer support services to children with disabilities in regular schools is the responsibility of RCI.

The District Primary Education Program (DPEP) of 1995 focused on increasing the number of girls in of primary education. The program’s focus was on quantitative targets and capacity-building of educational administration. Very few children with disabilities were integrated due to continued reliance on special schools (Alur, 2002).

The most important legislation for the rehabilitation of people with disabilities was the Persons with Disabilities Act (Equal Opportunities, Protection of Rights and Full Participation) (1995), which covers all the

aspects of the life of a person with a disability- education, employment, non-discrimination, health care, social security. The Act also required the government to make sure that free and appropriate education would be accessible to every child with disability till the age of 18 years. This act promoted integration of children with disabilities in a regular school, and special schools for those who need such facilities, equipping them with vocational training facilities. It also outlined a comprehensive scheme for the provision of facilities rights- from transportation and infrastructure to curriculum restructuring and examination systems.

The government passed yet another act, the National Trust for Welfare of Persons with Autism, Cerebral Palsy, Mental Retardation and Multiple Disabilities Act in 1999, focusing on inclusion and independence by creating barrier free environments, developing functional skills, providing economic rehabilitation, as well as to bring about a change in perceptions and attitudes of others towards persons with disabilities.

Janshala, community schools program, started in 1998 was replaced by *Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan* (SSA) in 2002 to achieve universal elementary level education. It is far behind in achieving its intended targets and there is apparently no sign of accelerated political momentum to lend a sense of urgency to the task. A specific feature of SSA is a 'zero-rejection' policy which suggests that no child having special needs can be neglected nor denied enrolment on the basis of such concerns.

The year 2005 saw the most recent and comprehensive policy push from Government of India for education of both children and adults with disabilities, in the form of the Minister of Human Resources Development's Policy Statement in March 2005. This was followed by the development of a national Action Plan for Inclusion in Education of Children and youth

with disabilities. This policy claimed to create opportunities so that children and adults with disabilities were not left out of the Government's plan of action on inclusive education, but gaps remain in what was expected and what was achieved (Baquer & Sharma, 2006).

The Central and State governments have formulated programs and policies over the years, offering schemes and facilities to children with disabilities in order to enable them to enter mainstream society. However, despite the presence of these policies, outreach remains inadequate, and the educational needs of many children with disabilities is not met. Although the concept of inclusive education has been promoted internationally for more than a decade, multiple barriers remain in India to the full participation of children with disabilities in education. Lack of information, combined with discriminatory attitudes towards persons with disabilities at all levels of society, contributes to the continued neglect of their right to education. This partly explains the minimal rate of progress that has been made towards the enrolment and participation in the education process of children with disabilities. The factors are complex and extend beyond the boundaries of the school and classroom.

Factors Influencing the Accessibility of Educational Facilities

Children with disabilities in India are among the most disadvantaged in terms of access to schooling and completion of elementary education. The World Bank Report (2009) noted that the people with disabilities are subject to multiple deprivations and that they are the most excluded from education. The report noted that children with disabilities are about four to five times less likely to go to school than the children from scheduled tribes and scheduled castes. Due to, school fees, transportation cost and parents not having time to accompany children to school, parents are

often forced to make a choice between providing education to a child with a disability and without a disability. Findings show that the more the severe a child's disability, the lower the chances of the child attending school. The report also suggested that people with disabilities have much lower educational attainment, with 52 percent illiterate as opposed to 35 percent illiteracy in the general population. Illiteracy levels are high across all categories of disability, and extremely so for children with visual, multiple and mental disabilities (and for children with severe disabilities across all the categories).

A position paper drafted by the NCERT (2006, p. 7) stated that "the Office of the Chief Commissioner of Persons with Disabilities stated that not more than 4 percent of children with disabilities have access to education".

Very little attention has been paid to educating the severely disabled. The enrolment rates are poor, educational performance is low, dropout rates are high (Baquer & Sharma, 2006).

Despite having a constitutional, rights-based policy framework for children with disabilities, there are various factors that have hindered the progress towards increasing access to education.

With data showing low enrolment and completion of schooling among children with disabilities in India it is important to understand the challenges.

Parents

Perception of Parents Towards Education and Disability. Parent's attitude towards children with disabilities and their education can be a key facilitator or a serious barrier to achieving inclusion and participation in a mainstream society. Parental perception plays a crucial role in determining the overall growth and development of a child with a disability. Social stigma about disability faced by parents is transferred to their children. The understanding

of a child's disability goes through a cycle of shock, grief, and acceptance for the parents. The type, severity, and visibility of disability affect parental acceptance of disability. The parents faced with the diagnosis of disability, are shocked and do not understand its implication. Inadequate counseling exists for parents to cope with the shock and to help them to accept their children's disability. As a result, some parents may be upset due to slow progress of their children. Therefore, they might make the child change schools often. Some parents may believe that their children cannot be educated like non-disabled children. Many parents may be overprotective which may, in turn, affect their child's educational outcome.

Lack of Awareness About Facilities. The Government of India has many schemes, policies, programmes for children with different disabilities but such facilities do not reach many families especially those who stay in villages or remote areas. Even many regular and special schools are not fully aware about the facilities and they could not provide adequate guidance to the parents. Many of the parents are unaware about the admissions, educational aids, vocational training, exam concessions, etc. That lack of awareness of educational facilities prevents parents from giving better education to their children with disabilities. People including parents and school are not aware of funding available to include students with disabilities in regular schools (Mondal & Mete, N.d. p.64)

Lack of Awareness About Disability Certificate. Children with disabilities did not have a disability certificate because of various reasons such as lack of awareness about the disability certificate, lack of awareness about the place from where to access disability certificate, a lack of awareness about the procedure of it, or even lack of awareness about the uses and importance of the disability certificate. Not having a disability certificate also is a reason for many

parents not enrolling their children in schools because they cannot access the benefits of government's education schemes.

Gender Discrimination

Gender stereotypes interact with disability stereotypes to constitute a deep matrix of gendered disability in every culture, developed within specific historical contexts, and affecting those contexts over time. Girls with disabilities are at the intersection of various forms of discrimination on the basis of disability and gender in India. Parental attitude is changing regarding the value of educating and training girls with disabilities but the prejudice surrounding their ability and value, continue to perpetuate the view that educating them is futile. This attitude encourages parents to deny the opportunity to their girls with disabilities to attend school. Many parents prefer training girls to be responsible homemakers and taking care of family members rather than sending them to school as they may also worry about their girls with disabilities being vulnerable in their community. Girls with disabilities are not considered an educational investment because they marry into a husband's family, whereas boys stay with and provide for their extended families all of their life. As a result, 68% of girls with disabilities are not in school. Girls with disabilities have a lower enrolment rate in school than boys with disabilities across many sectors: urban vs. rural, by type of schooling, by level of the schooling, and in primary versus secondary schooling (Kohama, 2012, p. 32).

The District Primary Education Program (DPEP) of 1995 focused on the universalization of primary education, primarily for girls. The program's focus was on quantitative targets and capacity-building of educational administration, and very few children with disabilities were integrated due to continued reliance on special schools (Alur, 2002). The thrust of SSA was on the closing of gender and social gaps and a total

retention of all children in schools. However, not much seems to have changed.

One report on women with disabilities in the Raichur district of Karnataka state indicated that the literacy rate of such women was 7 percent compared to a 46 percent general literacy rate for the state. Girls with disabilities have remained invisible both in the writings on gender and on disability. Therefore, the needs of girls with disabilities may be more severe than needs of any other group, and have to be addressed in all spheres of education (NCERT, 2005).

Civil Society

Social Stigma. Children with disabilities in India face stigma since birth due to several socio-religious beliefs. They also have to face patriarchal norms, traditional caste divide and class and religious community differences, thus facing manifold burdens in the process of education.

Age-old beliefs that if a child has a disability, it is due to child's or parents' "karma" (fate) or it is because of sins in the previous birth or that the mother has observed sun eclipse during her pregnancy are still commonly held. The stigma also comes from the influence of mythology and religious belief. In Hindu mythology, a person with disability is wicked and useless; and it is better to avoid such people in order to protect nondisabled people. Any attempts to improve the life of a person with a disability may be considered as an interference with a person's "karma" or defiance of the will of Allah (Mondal & Mete, N.d., p. 64). Society looks down upon the disability and people with disability affecting the families who have children with disability, therefore the family attempts to deny, hide their child's disability- this is especially true when children have developmental disabilities, such as mental retardation, autism, multiple disabilities. Therefore, due to the social stigma or taboo

associated with disabilities, families might be afraid to send their children to the school.

Lack of Awareness. Knowledge is not widespread through society of various types of disabilities and the impact on a child's development, nor of the need to have special pedagogy to achieve the educational qualification. Therefore, parents fail to understand the importance of education for such children and they do not know in what way they can encourage children with disabilities.

Unnoticeable Characteristics of Disabilities in the Community. The civil society may not recognize disabilities that cannot be easily identified. Lacking understanding of such children's unusual behavior and the challenges faced by them in learning, they label them as "stupid, useless, and mad". Some parents may feel strongly that their children's slow progress is due to the label. Therefore, they may change school often, or they may feel that there is no use to providing education to such children as it will not benefit them, and there is no point in spending money and time on them. Bagga (2007) claimed that due to segregation of children with disabilities, the general population does not get an opportunity to interact with them, and therefore may not be sensitized to the needs of children with disabilities.

School

Selection of School. Once child is diagnosed by medical professionals, they generally advise the parents to enroll their child in a special school. Some medical professionals and other professionals in the field of disability in cities may advise parents to admit their child in a regular school. In this process, I found that many parents are not counseled about the selection of the school, the advantages, and limitations of special schools and regular schools, preparation needed for the child before admission to a regular school as there are fewer

facilities for early intervention, especially in rural areas. There are special schools for children having a visual impairment, hearing impairment, intellectual disabilities but they tend to be concentrated in the big cities whereas there are few schools available for children with autism or multiple disabilities or learning disabilities or cerebral palsy especially in rural areas. As a result, parents' are limited to regular schools where teachers may not know how to teach such children. Many special schools test and interview a child with a disability, and his/her parents, and admit based on performance whereas some special schools admit based on vacancy. Most importantly, I found that there is no educational counseling provided to the parents in many places, i.e., explaining the implication of disability, the different pedagogy required for a type of disability, or the effort and time required for educational intervention. Children with disabilities who come from upper class and educated families are admitted to a regular private school and many regular schools are open to accommodate such children; those who come from lower economic background, may join in a regular municipal school if there is no availability of special school or far from their home. Thus, the parental decision of selecting a school is influenced by professional advice, and availability of kind of school near their home. For students with disabilities who never enrolled in school or drop out, there are government efforts through SSA teachers to identify such children and provide education for them.

The Right to Education Act. The Right to Education Act (2009) made it clear that every school including private or government or municipal schools must admit 25% of the total strength of that class for children with disadvantaged and weaker section including children with disabilities and provide free and compulsory education till its completion. Thus, schools cannot deny the admission of such

children in their school. Quoting Section 13 of the RTE Act 2009, the National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR) has pointed out that while admitting a child to school, the Act prohibits schools or persons from collecting capitation fees or subjecting the child or the parents and guardians to any screening procedure.

(<http://vikaspedia.in/education/policies-and-schemes/right-to-education/right-to-education-act>). If a school violates the rule, they could be punished with fines. In spite of this Act, it has yet to be implemented effectively which leads problems for children to access to school.

School Issue. Traditionally, the schools for children with disabilities are most commonly segregated institutions for those with visual, hearing, intellectually impairment. The special schools are concentrated in larger cities; there are hardly such facilities available in rural especially remote areas. In many cases, children with disabilities in the special schools were less proficient in basic literacy and numeracy skills, had lower expectations about their own capabilities and lacked confidence in social settings. As a result, parents were not motivated to send children with disabilities in the school as they felt that there was no point in sending them to the school.

Assistive Device. Many parents are not aware of the importance of assistive devices and many special schools are not able to explain the importance of aids and appliances and how to utilize them for the child's benefit. In the school for the deaf, for example, teachers may not know how to help a child with hearing impairment to hear with the help of hearing aids. As a result, such children and their parents do not show much interest in these aids, which affects the educational performance of these children. There is a debate about using oral and sign language for learning as a majority of schools

and parents prefer oral language. Additionally, some parents may find it difficult to obtain such aids and appliances, as availability of rehabilitative services tends to be concentrated in urban areas. Further, some parents were not aware of the programs for free aids and appliances based on their annual income. Some parents also found that the designs did not help their child to function effectively.

Negative Attitude Towards Disability and Education for Children with Disabilities. Some nondisabled children and teachers show their negative attitude towards children with disabilities in regular school by discriminating, ignoring, bullying, labeling, abusing verbally, and so on. There are few regular schools that try to understand the specific needs of children with disabilities, and to accommodate to them according to their needs, which would motivate children with disabilities and their parents to remain in school. This results in many parents pulling their children out of school.

Teachers

It is of utmost importance for the education of children with disabilities that staff in schools receive training and supervision in order to provide appropriate instruction to students with disabilities. The teacher's attitude is of utmost importance in the education of children with disabilities because their judgments can have a social, emotional and intellectual influence on the well-being of a child.

Lack of Training and Lack of Interest. The special school teachers have the training to teach the children with disabilities, but they also need to update their knowledge especially, pedagogy in this field from time to time. Unfortunately, many special school teachers are interested securing a good job in government or in a local government school. Once they secure such job they lose interest in updating their knowledge,

developing new approaches, focusing new way to help children to improve their performance.

Further, the teacher's training course for special school teachers fails to train teachers adequately to work in an integrated setting (Mondal & Mete, N.d., p. 65). Those with temporary jobs in a private school for disabled children, are trying to apply to other schools, and therefore not paying attention to teaching children with disabilities.

The majority of school personnel in India are not trained to design and implement educational programmes for students with disabilities in regular schools (Mondal & Mete, N.d., p. 65). Personnel in many regular schools have negative attitudes towards children with disabilities and some of them are not comfortable teaching such children. Lack of sensitivity amongst the teachers itself acts as an impediment to the education of children with disabilities. One of the important reasons for considerably insensitive attitudes of teachers towards children with disabilities may be their total lack of training or exposure in the field.

It can be argued that the model being adopted by Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) is further deskilling mainstream teachers by assuming that the educational needs of children with disabilities are not the primary concern of the general teacher, rather they need to be addressed by a resource teacher or indeed teachers in special schools. NCERT (2006, p. 23) recommended that there is a need to, "gear all teacher education programmes (both pre-service and in-service) to developing the pedagogical skills required in inclusive classrooms". Implementation of an inclusive curriculum would require a number of changes in present day teaching practices, curriculum content, evaluation procedures and available resources at the school level. Adapted curricula and learning materials, for meeting the learning needs of children with disabilities both in content and format, are not readily available in most states. This applies both to adaptation of regular

curricula and to differences in curriculum between special and regular schools.

Social Access. Social access to schooling is important as physical access. It is important that schools recognize the diversity in our situation such as language, caste, class. If the language of instruction in a school in a tribal area is the State language, from class I itself, then the child is likely to find the school environment alienating. (RTA SSA Final report, N.d., p. 7) The children with disabilities, who come from poor and illiterate families, may not have support to do homework and therefore they may find difficult to take an interest in further studies. The teachers' own patterns of communication with children, the seating arrangements in the classroom, allocation of work between children, can serve to reinforce (or dispel) societal perceptions about the 'proper' role and place of girls and scheduled caste/scheduled tribe (SC/ST) and minority community students. Thus, ensuring access to schooling is a wider challenge and is not confined merely to opening schools in or near the habitations where children reside (RTA SSA Final Report, N.d., p. 7)

Difficulties Related to School. Some teachers may be aware that children with disabilities, due to the presence of impairment may not be able to keep up with the pace of class, but they may not pay attention to such children as the number of students in the class is large, and hence, a child with disability remains neglected. This at times also may result in loss of child's interest towards education.

Shortage of Special Teachers. There are quite Many teachers prefer to teach in schools in big cities therefore there is a dearth of special school teachers in rural and remote areas, despite the number of teachers training courses for special school teachers run by government and non-government institutes. Many special schools do

not have adequate funds and find it difficult to provide competitive salaries. They pay less salary, which forces teachers to leave; some teachers get temporary jobs in such schools and stay for few years. As a result, there is a shortage of teachers and those who are in such schools, are forced to teach 2-3 classes at the same time, affecting the quality of the education provided to children with disabilities.

Poverty

In India, due to overpopulation, in spite of efforts of the Government of India, it is difficult to reduce the percentages of families who are below poverty line. A large number of children with disabilities belong to families that are below the poverty line. Disability may be compounded by poverty because it leads to barriers to education and skill development. Because of economic hardship, families may find difficult to provide educational facilities including expensive assistive device and it becomes challenging for poor families to send children with disabilities to the school. Thus, poverty and disability go hand in hand. The combination of poverty and disability results in a condition of “simultaneous deprivation”. This is a syndrome that sets up barriers to the participation of persons with disabilities in the normal routines and activities of the community, including regular schooling (Mondal & Mete, N.d., p. 64).

Accessibility

Schools are sometimes far from the home and there is a lack of transportation and lack of accessibility of travelling especially in slum areas in big cities, villages and remote areas. There should be all options of education, such as, open schools, regular schools, special schools, non-formal and alternative education systems, available to all children with disabilities but unfortunately appropriate services are rare or unavailable. Children with disabilities face

barriers if the school is not within their easy mobility and reach zones.

Within school premises, children face many difficulties in accessing the washroom, libraries, classroom, and playground. Although the attitudes toward inclusion of children with disabilities are gradually improving, there appears to be less movement with respect to general community attitudes with regard to building “Barrier Free Environments” in which people with disabilities can move about safely, independently and freely to use the facilities. School buildings in India are predominantly not accessible to people with disabilities; only 18% of SSA schools were “barrier free,” and the numbers are even lower in some states, with 2% in Jammu and Kashmir, and 6% in Bihar and most of the school buildings are already built, and building modifications are expensive in a country that already has resource-starved programs (Kohama, 2012, p. 36). However, all schools are not the same in terms of their physical infrastructure or in the quality of teaching. There are differences between rural and urban schools; public and private schools and even within public and private schools. Clearly, all children do not have the same learning opportunities.

Government Policies

Implementation of policy. In spite of Central government sponsoring funds, many states in India show a lack of interest in implementing the policy. For example, out of 35 states/Union Territories (UTs), 16 states/UTs started implementing of Inclusive Education of Disabled at Secondary Stages (IEDSS) which replaced the earlier plan of Integrated Education for Disabled children in 2009-10, 7 states/UTs started it 2010-11 and 4 states/UTs started it in 2011-12. Eight states namely Arunachal Pradesh, Chandigarh, Chattisgarh, Dadra & Nagar Haveli, Goa, Jammu & Kashmir, Jharkhand and Lakshadweep are still not implementing the

IEDSS in spite of 100% financial support by the Central government. (Jhulka & Bansal, N.d.)

Funds Issue. Many states have not yet furnished the progress reports of the schemes undertaken and they did not submit utilization certificates of funds released; that created delays in the release of additional funds even after the approval by PMEG (Project Monitoring and Evaluation Group) to continue further work. (Jhulka & Bansal, N.d.)

Lack of Linkages Between Different Departments. The government has devolved responsibility for education to different ministries and departments which created issues of lack of coordination, inability to develop a coherent strategy and duplication of efforts. For example, the education of children with disabilities attending special schools is the responsibility of the Ministry of Social Justice Empowerment, whereas children with disabilities in mainstream settings fall under the purview of the Ministry of Human Resource Department. While the former is financing special schools, the latter is trying to evolve an inclusive approach. This fragmented approach historically adopted by the government in response to the perceived unique needs of certain groups of children underscores an important dilemma. In addition, there is weak coordination of teacher training between Rehabilitation Council of India and the general teacher training system with respect to special needs, lack of coordination in early identification of children with special needs, and efforts towards convergence between government and NGOs/communities. Responsibility for teacher training is split between the Rehabilitation Council of India, which is responsible for the training of special education teachers, and the Ministry of Human Resource Development, which is responsible for general education teacher training. This split between the types of teacher training does not promote inclusion at all (Kohama, 2012, p. 34). There is an absence of coherent government strategy for promoting

inclusive education in many states. However, the experience of states like Tamilnadu and Gujarat offer cause for hope, with directed strategies for public/NGO partnerships to improve coverage and quality of inclusive education. (World Bank Report, 2009).

Severity of disability. The Legislature has failed to distinguish between the needs of children having mild, moderate and severe disabilities and therefore, children with disabilities who could have been integrated into the mainstream schools are denied the opportunity. (Bagga, 2007).

Curriculum. There is a special curriculum designed for children with disabilities to increase accessibility such as language exemption for children with hearing impairment, communication for children with cerebral palsy. When these children enter regular school, they may find difficult to learn the general curriculum. The general curriculum needs to be adapted to the different formats that the special curriculum is available in to make it accessible for children with disabilities. (Kohama, 2012, P. 36).

Recommendations

Interventions should be effective for children, offer good value for money and be sustainable. This section highlights a range of approaches that can be undertaken to improve accessibility of education for children with disabilities.

1. Improving the work on identification of children with different disabilities and promoting overall access to school for them are vital.
2. Involvement of different stakeholders such as school, community leaders, government officers, parents having children with disabilities, Disabled people organization in facilitating education for children with

- disabilities by adopting partnership approach.
3. The creation of barrier free environment including provision of ramps, transport facilities for accessibility to school.
 4. Creating facilities for home based schooling or special education for children with multiple disabilities, deaf-blind and intellectual and severe disabilities who may not be able to attend regular school.
 5. Organizing teacher training refresher courses for all teachers from private and government school on information on disability, individual educational plans, teaching-learning methods to support the education of children with disabilities.
 6. Addressing attitudinal barriers by community awareness programme on disability and education
 7. Making it mandatory for representation of parents of children with disabilities in education committee
 8. Conducting parental education programme such as workshop, training materials to help parents support their child's learning
 9. Ensuring coordination with various ministries and line departments responsible for education and spell out each one role for effective implementation of educational policy for children with disabilities

Conclusion

Children with disabilities face a number of barriers to achieving their full potential. Due to various hurdles, particularly for those who are poor and who suffer other forms of humiliations, the families of these children frequently experience high levels of stress. Lack of, or inadequate vocational training creates immense obstacles for children with disabilities to get out of their whirlpool of deprivations. They are more likely to live in poverty and face increased risk of social exclusion. Trends in Provision of services in India reflect the leading policy

predisposition before the 1970s of segregation. However, changing approaches to disability, from the charity model to the human rights model, have resulted in diversity of policy and practice. Despite the efforts of governmental and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), there is still a significant need to facilitate access to children with disabilities to educational institutions and to education in general.

References:

- Alur, M. (2002). "Special Needs Policy in India", in S. Hegarty & M. Alue (eds), *Education and Children with Special Needs: From Segregation to Inclusion*. New Delhi: Sage.
- Bagga, K. S. (2007) Ensuring disabled people their right to education, *India Law Journal*, 1, 4, Retrieved on 13th March, 2016 from http://indialawjournal.com/volume1/issue_4/article_by_bagga.html
- Baquer, A. & Sharma, A. (2006) *Disability: Challenges vs Responses*, New Delhi: Concerned Action Now and Global College Press, Arizona.
- Byrd, E.S., (2010), India, Families and a Special School, *TEACHING Exceptional Children Plus*, 6 (3) Article 6. Retrieved on 17th March 2016, from <http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ879598.pdf>
- Julka, A. & Bansal, I. (N.d.) , *Evaluation of the Implementation of the Schemes IEDSS in India*, New Delhi: Department of Education of Groups with Special Needs (DEGSN), NCERT, Retrieved on 10th July 2015 from http://www.ncert.nic.in/departments/nie/degsn/pdf_files/fp3.pdf
- Kohama, Angela (2012). *Inclusive Education in India: A Country in Transition*, Retrieved on 18th March 2016 from <http://intldept.uoregon.edu/wp-content/uploads/2012/12/INTL-UG-Thesis-Kohama.pdf>
- Lal, Rubina (2005) Effect of Inclusive Education on Language and Social Development of Children with Autism, *Asia Pacific Disability Rehabilitation Journal*, 16, 1 2005, pp 78-84. Retrieved on 18th March 2016 from <http://english.aifo.it/disability/apdrj/apdrj105/inclu.ed.pdf>
- Ministry of Human Resource Development. (1986). *Ministry of Human Resource Development: National Policy of Education 1986*. New Delhi: Government of India. Retrieved on 17th July 2015, from http://mhrd.gov.in/sites/upload_files/mhrd/files/document-reports/NPE86-mod92.pdf

- Ministry of Human Resource Development (2004). *Education for all: India marches ahead*. New Delhi: Government of India. Retrieved on 17th July 2015, from http://mhrd.gov.in/sites/upload_files/mhrd/files/upload_document/EFA-Review-Report-final.pdf
- Ministry of Law and Justice. (1996). *The Persons with Disabilities (Equal Opportunities, Protection of Rights and Full Participation) Act, 1995*. New Delhi: Government of India. Retrieved on 17th July 2015, from http://www.disabilityaffairs.gov.in/upload/uploadfiles/files/PWD_Act.pdf
- Mondal, A. & Mete, J. (N.d.) *Education of Children with Disabilities in India: Concern and Policy Perspective* Accessed on 18th July 2015 from http://www.caluniv.ac.in/academic/education_journal/7%20Education%20of%20Children%20with%20Disabilities%20in%20India%20Concern%20and%20Policy%20Perspective.pdf
- National Council of Educational Research and Training (2005). *The National focus group on education of children with special needs. Position paper*. Accessed on 18th July 2015 from http://www.ncert.nic.in/sites/publication/schoolcurriculum/Position_Papers/Special%20Needs%20Education%20Final%20.pdf
- National Council of Educational Research and Training (Feb 2006) *Position paper, National Focus Group on Education with Children with Special Needs*, NCERT, New Delhi, Accessed on 18th July 2015 from http://epathshala.nic.in/wp-content/doc/NCF/Pdf/special_ed_final1.pdf
- National Sample Survey 58th round (July to December 2002 (2003). *National Sample Survey Organisation*, Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation, Government of India. Accessed on 16th July, 2015, from http://mospi.nic.in/rept%20_%20pubn/485_final.pdf
- Registrar General of India (2011). *Census of India*. 2011. Retrieved on 1st July 2015 from: <http://www.censusindia.net>.
- RTA SSA Final Report (N.d.) Retrieved on 10th March 2016 from <http://ssa.nic.in/quality-docs/RTE%20SSA%20Final%20Report.pdf>
- Target Study, (2013), *Education of Disabled Children in India*, retrieved on 17th July 2015, <https://targetstudy.com/articles/education-of-disabled-children-in-india.html>
- World Bank (July 2009) *People with Disabilities in India: from commitments to Outcomes*, New Delhi: Human Development Unit, South Asia Region. Retrieved on 10th July 2015 from http://www-wds.worldbank.org/external/default/WDSContentServer/WDSP/IB/2009/09/02/000334955_20090902041543/Rendered/PDF/502090WPOPeopl1Box0342042Bo1PUBLIC1.pdf
- Zachariah, Job (December, 3, 2000). *Education of Disabled: Open the Door*. Retrieved on 18th March 2016 from <http://pib.nic.in/feature/fevr2000/fdec2000/fo11220001.html>

Website sources

Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009 (Right to Education Act) Retrieved on 16th July, 2015 from <http://vikaspedia.in/education/policies-and-schemes/right-to-education/right-to-education-act>

About the Author

Sandhya Limaye, PhD, is Associate Professor, Center for Disability Studies and Action, School of Social work, Tata Institute of Social Sciences. She is a former Rockefeller, Fulbright, and Erasmus Mundus Fellow, and has worked with the disabled population in India for the last 32 years. She runs a field action project iCBR (Inclusive Community Based Rehabilitation), for overall rehabilitation for the people with disabilities from rural and slum areas of Mumbai. She has done collaborative research with the University of Minnesota on Disability and Identity. She has published multiple articles based on her research on various issues related to disability.