

A STUDY OF PHYSICALLY CHALLENGED CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO THEIR EDUCATIONAL PROBLEMS IN KASHMIR

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Abstract

The programmes and policy initiatives like 'Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) meaning 'Education for All Movement' and 'Right to Education' (RTE) launched by the government have contributed to a new vibrancy and urgency in the country's efforts to achieving the goals of Universalisation of Elementary Education (UEE). SSA ensures that every child with special needs irrespective of the kind, category and degree of disability, is provided meaningful and quality education. Pursuant to this, physically challenged children (PCC) with the requisite level of educability are admitted in general schools along with normal children. But how they cope up in the classroom situation, what kind of treatment they receive from the teachers, what their achievement levels are - all this is unknown. The present study is an attempt to explore the answers to the above questions besides understanding the extent, provisions of facilities and problems of PCC in general schools.

Key words: Physically challenged children, children with special needs, visually impaired, hearing impaired, and speech impaired, locomotor impaired.

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INTRODUCTION

The progress of any nation in the world of today, more than ever before, is dependent upon the quantity and quality of education received by its people. In as much as food, shelter and clothing still have their salience, the urgency for participation in economic basic development processes cannot be overlooked. At the same time, a fully satisfying life has many other facets - intellectual, physical, vocational, social, aesthetic, spiritual - that have to be taken into account in a perspective that deals with not only the present but also the future. Education as a basic human need therefore opens up unlimited possibilities calling for responses that are constructive, creative and challenging. The Declaration of the Rights of the child, proclaimed by the General Assembly of the United Nations in 1959, includes two principles relating to education. It states that "the child is entitled to receive education, which shall be free and compulsory, at least in the elementary stages. He or she shall be given an education which will promote his/ her general culture and enable him/ her on the basis of equal opportunity, to develop his/ her abilities, his/ her individual judgment and his/ her sense of moral and social responsibility and to become a useful member of society. The best interests of the child shall be guiding principle of those responsible for his/ her education and guidance; that responsibility lays in the first place with his/ her parents. The child shall have full opportunity for play and recreation, which should be directed to the same purposes as education, and society and the public authorities shall endeavour to promote enjoyment of this right."

Another principle states that "the child who is physically, mentally or socially handicapped shall be given the special treatment, education and care required by his/ her particular condition."

The Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination, proclaimed by the General Assembly of the United Nations in 1960 includes Article 1 with this reference to education: For the purpose of this convention, the term discrimination includes any distinction, exclusion, limitation or reference which, being based on race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, natural or social origin, economic condition or birth, has the purpose or effect of nullifying or impairing equality of treatment in education'.

In parallel with placing all citizens' education in a context of human resource development for their effective integration in socio economic development, education of the differently able is gradually being recognised as a vehicle for similar integration and for the generation of pre-requisite human resources among the disabled. Any group of individuals that is forced to remain dependent on society becomes a burden to that society and its government neglecting the development of potential human resources is tantamount to 'a crime against the nation'. Disabled populations, especially in developing countries, have shown that, when provided opportunities for human resource development they rely less on society and contribute more to the nation.

NEED AND IMPORTANCE

In India education is being recognised as absolutely critical to enable disabled children to realise their abilities. According to the World Bank (2007) disability has stronger correlation to non-enrolment than gender or socio-economic status in India.

In India a two pronged strategy of educating disabled children is being pursued. It supports the inclusion or integration of majority of disabled into mainstream school or alongside special schools for the more severely disabled.

The NPE 1986 brought fundamental issue of equality for children with special needs, to the forefront. Furthermore, the Standard Rules on Equalisation of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities 1995 was an important resolution to improve the educational conditions of persons with disabilities. This has major implications for the Indian situation in the form of three legislative Acts:

- i) RCI Act (1992): Under this act registration of every special teacher is mandatory. The act has been instrumental in promoting equality and participation of persons with disabilities on one hand and eliminating discrimination of all kinds, on the other.
- ii) The Persons with Disabilities Act (1995): the act made access to regular schools easier. The act made it mandatory to provide free education to children with disabilities in an appropriate environment, until the age of 18 years.
- iii) National Trust for Welfare of Persons with Autism, Cerebral Palsy, Mental Retardation and Multiple Disabilities Act (1999) was passed in 1999 for the economic rehabilitation of the people with disabilities. The trust will be empowered to receive grants.

With respect to 'Out of School' children in J & K, the SSA reports that the state does not have any mechanism to identify 'Out of School' children. The research in this most important area of education has not received much attention and such studies are more than warranted. The views of the N.P.E (1986) in this regard are noteworthy:

"Research in Education of the handicapped in the Indian socio-cultural milieu is to be taken up immediately. The NCERT, ICSSR, UGC and National Institute should promote research in this area. There is very little involvement of the universities and dearth of persons who can carry out and supervise research in this area"

After going through a number of related studies it was found that a considerable number of studies have been done on physically challenged children but there is almost no study conducted on PCC enrolled in general schools especially in the state of J&K. The investigator therefore, has taken up an in-depth study exclusively on physically challenged children in order to understand the extent, provision of facilities and educational problems of these children. The present study is a micro-study and focussed on physically challenged children of district Srinagar of Kashmir valley.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY:

The objectives of the study were as under:

1. To study the extent of physically challenged children (boys and girls) aged 6-14 yrs, in the school and out of school in Kashmir Valley.
2. To study the enrolment of physically challenged children (boys and girls) aged 6-14 yrs in general schools of district Srinagar.
3. To study the problems faced by heads of the institutions and the teachers of general schools.
4. To find out the problems of physically challenged children (boys and girls) in general schools.

DESIGN OF THE STUDY:

The present research study has been designed on descriptive methodology which helps to obtain precise information about the current status of a phenomenon by investigating it in its natural setting. Descriptive research is facilitated by survey of opinions and suggestions of the stakeholders. For this study, data was gathered from institutional records as well as from institution heads, teachers and students, analysed and interpreted to obtain significance of results vis-a-vis the objectives formulated while designing the study. Research tools in the form of structured, semi-structured and unstructured questionnaire/ interview schedule were administered on institution heads, teachers and PCC students through multiple channels of communication. The contents of the questionnaire and interview schedule were validated by Faculty Members of University of Kashmir/ MANUU, College of Education.

DATA ANALYSIS:

The data collected on the basis of various tools and techniques keeping in view the objectives of the study have been placed on tables. By nature, collected data were quantitative and were analysed through descriptive statistics. Accordingly a comprehensive analysis and interpretation has been done.

Table 1: Showing the extent of Physically Challenged Children (aged 6-14 yrs) in Kashmir Valley *

District	Visual Impaired			Hearing Impaired			Speech Impaired			Loco motor Impaired			Grand Total
	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls	Total	
Anantnag	341	271	612	74	59	133	175	101	276	253	171	424	1445
Bandipora	51	43	94	76	54	130	47	45	92	67	60	127	443
Baramulla	526	352	878	109	81	190	237	179	416	370	212	582	2066
Budgam	230	177	407	78	50	128	95	64	159	184	123	307	1001
Ganderbal	101	75	176	36	28	64	94	40	134	89	57	146	520
Kulgam	155	123	278	36	34	70	106	60	166	174	167	341	855
Kupwara	375	269	644	123	98	221	203	138	341	178	143	321	1527
Pulwama	187	149	336	59	34	93	83	47	130	79	42	121	680
Shopian	94	50	144	26	14	40	75	39	114	62	33	95	393
Srinagar	570	550	1120	94	110	204	55	56	111	90	72	162	1597
Grand Total	2630	2059	4689	711	562	1273	1170	769	1939	1546	1080	2626	10527

*Source: Report of State Project Director SSA, J&K, 2014-15

The above table reflects that there are 10,527 physically challenged children in Kashmir Valley. Out of these 57.53% are boys and 42.46% are girls. It further shows that District Baramulla had the highest number of PCC and district Shopian had the least number of PCC.

Table 2: Showing the Enrolment of Physically Challenged Children (aged 6-14 yrs) in Kashmir Valley *

District	Visual Impaired			Hearing Impaired			Speech Impaired			Loco motor Impaired			Grand Total
	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls	Total	
Anantnag	321	247	568	56	42	98	162	91	253	199	117	316	1235
Bandipora	47	39	86	76	54	130	43	41	74	65	42	107	397
Baramulla	493	300	793	103	73	176	229	170	399	272	159	431	1799
Budgam	167	105	272	59	25	84	95	64	159	91	62	153	668
Ganderbal	99	72	171	36	26	62	83	32	115	70	48	118	466
Kulgam	155	123	278	36	34	70	106	60	166	130	105	235	749
Kupwara	295	187	482	69	64	133	136	96	232	128	99	227	1074
Pulwama	171	139	310	56	30	86	81	45	126	75	40	115	637
Shopian	84	45	129	23	10	33	75	37	112	54	27	81	355
Srinagar	568	546	1114	92	109	201	51	43	94	84	69	153	1562
Grand Total	2400	1803	4203	606	467	1073	1061	669	1730	1168	768	1936	8942

*Source: Report of State Project Director SSA, J&K, 2014-15

The above table reveals that out of 10,527 PCC in Kashmir valley there were 8942 PCC enrolled in educational institutions. Amongst these enrolled PCC 58.54% were boys and 41.45 % were girls. Highest number of enrolment was shown by District Baramulla followed by Srinagar, Anantnag, Kupwara, Kulgam, Budgam, Pulwama, Ganderbal, Bandipora and Shopian.

Table 3: Showing the number of Out of School Physically Challenged Children (aged 6-14 yrs) in Kashmir Valley*

District	Visual Impaired			Hearing Impaired			Speech Impaired			Loco motor Impaired			Grand Total
	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls	Total	
Anantnag	20	24	49	18	17	35	13	10	23	54	54	108	210
Bandipora	04	04	08	X	x	X	04	14	18	02	18	20	46
Baramulla	33	52	85	06	08	14	08	09	17	98	53	155	267
Budgam	63	72	135	19	25	44	x	X	x	93	61	154	333
Ganderbal	02	03	05	00	02	02	11	08	19	19	09	28	54
Kulgam	00	00	00	00	00	x	x	X	x	44	62	106	106
Kupwara	80	82	162	54	34	88	67	42	109	50	44	94	453
Pulwama	16	10	26	03	04	07	02	02	04	04	02	06	43
Shopian	10	5	15	03	04	07	x	02	02	08	06	14	38
Srinagar	02	04	06	02	01	03	04	13	17	06	03	09	35
	230	256	486	105	95	200	109	100	209	378	312	690	1585

*Source: Report of State Project Director SSA, J&K 2014-15.

The above table reveals that there was a significant number 'out of school' physically challenged children. There are 1585 PCC in District Srinagar. Highest number of out of school PCC were in District Kupwara and lowest number of such PCC were in district Srinagar.

Table 4: Showing the Enrolment of Physically Challenged Children (6-14years)

Sl. No.	Educational Zone	Visually Impaired	Hearing Impaired	Speech Impaired	Locomotor Impaired	Total
1.	Batamaloo	122	64	30	58	274
2'	Gulabagh	149	38	11	20	218
3.	Hawal	98	21	17	24	160
4.	Iddgah	329	28	8	15	380
5.	Nishat	152	34	10	15	211
6.	Rainawari	128	5	6	3	142
7.	Srinagar	89	10	10	16	125
8.	Zaldagar	47	1	2	2	52
	Total	1114	201	94	153	1562

*Source: Report of State Project Director SSA, J&K 2014-15.

The perusal of the table reflects that there were 1562 PCC enrolled in eight educational zones of district Srinagar. Educational zone of Iddgah had the highest number of PCC and the lowest number of PCC was in Zaldagar zone.

Table 5: Showing Enrolment of Physically Challenged Children gender wise in District Srinagar*

Category	Visual Impaired	Hearing impaired	Speech Impaired	Locomotor Impaired	Total
Male	568 (36.15)	92 (5.85)	51 (3.24)	84 (5.34)	795 (50.61)
Female	546 (34.75)	109 (6.93)	43 (3.30)	69 (4.39)	767 (49.39)
Total	1114 (70.91)	201 (12.79)	94 (6.55)	153 (9.73)	1562 (100)

(The percentage is given in parenthesis)

***Source: Report of State Project Director SSA,J&K.**

The above table shows that in district Srinagar out of 1562 physically challenged children enrolled in schools, children with visual impairment constituted 70.9% followed by hearing impaired 12.79%, locomotor impaired 9.7% and 6.5% were speech impaired.

FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

1. As against 40 million children in the age group of 4 – 16 yrs. with disabilities at All India level there were 10527 physically challenged children in Kashmir Valley in the age group of 6 – 14 years. Among these, 57.53% were boys and 42.46% were girls.
2. The number of physically challenged children (6 – 14 yrs) enrolled in general schools of District Srinagar is 1562 against an enrolment of 8942 physically challenged children in various District of Kashmir valley.
3. There were only 4 resource rooms for the entire district of Srinagar for the physically challenged children enrolled in general schools.
4. Since the physically challenged children in general schools require modified infrastructure facilities i.e. ramps, handrails, furniture, books with large print, special TLMs suited to their different needs, there were no special grants/ funds available to meet the requirement of these children.
5. Staff working in general schools were not having any orientation & training suited to the needs of the physically challenged children.
6. The general schools are mostly meant for the 'other children'. Therefore the enrolment of physically challenged children in these schools adds to the workload of the teachers as they demand extra time.
7. Teachers are not consulted in decision making or in formulating the policy related to development by physically challenged children as was expressed by the teachers during the investigator's interaction with teachers on various occasions.
8. Majority of the general schools are physically inaccessible in terms of lack of ramps, lift and handrails, so as to have access to every nook and corner of the school.
9. Physically challenged children expressed explicitly that: the furniture in the schools is not designed as per their needs. They face difficulty in moving in and around the classroom.
10. In spite of the fact that there are many problems & difficulties faced by physically challenged children in general schools, the academic achievement of the physically challenged children is very encouraging as is reflected in the result record of the schools.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. It is recommended that in order to retain physically challenged children at the upper primary level of education, proper infrastructure is made available in all the institutions.
2. There is a significant gap between identified physically challenged children and their enrolment in the schools. It is therefore, suggested that mass awareness campaigns, effective community mobilisation programmes should be organised so that no child with any physical challenge is left behind.

3. It is suggested that there should be provision for such children to be tackled in special type of schools. Additionally, there should be disability specific special schools in every district so as to take care of a large population of physically challenged children.
4. The teachers need to be well trained and skilful so that they can adapt their teaching to the needs of the physically challenged children.
5. It is suggested that more resource rooms need to be established. Also the services available in Composite Regional Centre, Srinagar should be utilised by School Education, Department, Srinagar.
6. It is suggested that there must be provision of scholarships made readily available to physically challenged children.
7. There should be more educational training and qualification enhancement programmes for teachers of both general and special schools and other rehabilitation workers. Orientation programmes, workshops, seminars, awareness and sensitisation campaigns should be organised for all the stakeholders concerned with physically challenged children so that quality education is imparted to these children..
8. It is suggested that pupil teacher ratio should be minimised so as to increase the chance of interaction with teachers.
9. It is proposed that in order to ensure an effective implementation of various programmes related to physically Challenged Children, there should be a regular coordination between these various agencies.

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