

Learning Mechanism Practices for Learners' Academic Achievement in Schools for Special Children of Assam

¹Dr. Jahangir Hussain Alom

ABSTRACT--- Learning mechanisms plays crucial role in the process of education. Education for children with special needs is an emerging trend worldwide, and many countries have established monitoring activities and mechanisms of education for special needs children at institutional, local and national level. The paper intends to study the effect of special learning mechanisms on learners' academic achievement, and qualification and training level of the teachers of special schools of Assam. Random sampling technique was applied for selecting the sample, and descriptive survey method was applied to collect data. Both qualitative and quantitative data analysis techniques were used. The major inferences of the study have been revealed that the different categories of special needs children are taught through various mechanisms such as- visual impaired students were taught through Braille method, flash chart; hearing impaired students were taught through sign language and hearing devices; mentally challenged students were provided with the basic 3Rs and life skill training. The effect of the special learning mechanisms reflected remarkable academic achievements of the students, for instance, the students of Sudhir Ch. Chakravorty Academy for blind obtained 92% average marks in the final examination of 2009-10 session. The paper also showed that the teachers working in the schools for special children of Assam are found to be highly experienced (i.e., 56.67% up to 10 years, 25.23% up to 20 years and 17.78% above 20 years) and trained (85.56% trained and 14.44% untrained) teachers.

Keywords--- Learning Mechanisms, Special Needs Children, Special School, Learners' Academic Achievement

I. INTRODUCTION

Education of the special needs children has a deep rooted history, and many changes have been taking place in education and training of children with special needs from time to time. Special education remains a central place in the system of present day education. Education for all is an inclusive idea which recognized education as birth right for all irrespective of caste, creed, colour, gender, religion including disability. The struggle for achieving education for all was recognized for the first time in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UN, 1948). Some countries have developed various learning mechanisms and strategies for catering the basic needs and demands of the learners' with special needs. For instance, in Kenya before the Special Needs Education (SNE) policy was put in place in March 2010, the implementation and practice of special education programmes was guided by the policies stated in the Sessional Paper No. 5 of 1968 and No. 6 of 1988. These policies pointed out that the needs of the children with special needs should be catered for in special schools. The recently launched

¹Dr. Jahangir Hussain Alom, Assistant Professor of Education, Kharupetia College, Kharupetia, Darrang, Assam, India
alom.jhussain@gmail.com

SNE policy clearly points out on the need to implement inclusive education as a viable means of achieving EFA goal (MoE, 2009).

Special learning mechanisms refers to the strategies of instruction which includes machines and materials, discipline, time-table, admission procedure, teaching methods, administrative and management style including government accountability for enabling and empowering the children with special needs. Many countries have established monitoring activities and mechanisms of education at school, local and national level. Some countries have a “coordinating mechanism” for the monitoring of the implementation of policies and schemes, for example, Cyprus, has assigned a “Coordinating Mechanism for monitoring the implementation of the National Action Plan on Disability.” China- Hong Kong similarly has put in place a co-ordination mechanism to facilitate related actions and measures to involve the community, in particular persons with disabilities and their representative organizations in the monitoring process and preparation of the country report. Education in India is managed by the Ministry of Human Resources and Development and does not have any separate political entity. In 1986, the National Policy on Education established compulsory education for all children between the ages of 6 and 14 (Sharma and Das, 2015). The ‘Education For All’ movement of *Sarva Shiksha Abhyan* (SSA) grew to be a national programme following the EFA conference in Dakar in 2000. Although evidence shows that progress was made towards access for vulnerable groups (scheduled casts, scheduled tribes, girls, children with disabilities, etc.) (Singal, 2005), the achievements in terms of quality of learning have been more difficult to grasp, even for the very basic skills of literacy and numeracy (UNESCO, 2015). Under Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA), the focus during the 11th Plan was to mainstream CWSN in regular schools, and support their participation in the schooling process. The number of CWSN identified under SSA stands at 30.42 lakh; out of which 25.96 lakh CWSN are enrolled in schools; 0.52 lakh are enrolled in EGS/AIE centers and another 1.38 lakh are provided support through home-based education. The current total coverage of CWSN under SSA, thus, stands at 27.80 lakh (Progress of Inclusive Education in SSA. MHRD, 2009-10). The 2005 Action Plan for Inclusive Education of Children and Youth with Disabilities brought into focus the specific actions required for making education a successful learning experience for this group. In 2009, the Right of Children to free and compulsory education Act (RTE) was passed to ensure compulsory education between the ages of 6 and 14. The Right to Education (RTE) Act promises new stimulus to the education of CWSN in an enabling inclusive environment, irrespective of the kind, category and degree of their disability.

India signed and ratified the UNCRPD in 2006 (Singal, 2006). Also, several countries conflate article 33 (1) and 33 (2), that is to say implementation and its monitoring. For example, in Spain, the National Disability Council is “the institutional body responsible for the application and implementation of the Convention, incorporating into its functions that of serving as the focal point in the general administration of State for the promotion, protection and monitoring in Spain of the international legal instruments relating to the human rights of persons with disabilities” (UNESCO, 2017). Until 2011, the national census did not include information pertaining to children with disabilities. The 2011 Census of India comprised of a sole question to screen for disability within households, thus largely underestimating the prevalence of disabilities (2.7%), especially the most stigmatized forms of disabilities. A 2014 report carried out by the Social and Rural Research Institute provides more detailed data: 1.05% of children have a disability (2.1 million) and children with mental or multiple disabilities are disproportionately out of schools: 35.9% and 44.1% respectively (Social and Rural Research Institute, 2014).

Finally, policy documents that frame education in India present disability under various labels (autism, hearing, visual, loco-motor, etc.), but ignore compounding factors, such as gender, cast, religion or living in a rural setting, which all require a set of specific actions to ensure meaningful inclusion. From the overall discussion the researcher felt that hardly any study have been conducted on special learning mechanisms practices in the special schools in India. Therefore, the researcher interested to study on the special learning mechanisms practices for the learners' in the special schools of Assam. The study intends- to study the effect of special learning mechanisms on learners' academic achievement, and to study the qualification and training level of teachers teaching in schools for special children of Assam.

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The present project work was carried out to know the learning mechanisms applied in the schools (selected school) for special children of Assam, and also to know the qualification and training level of the teachers in the special schools of Assam. A bunch of research works has been undertaken on special needs children worldwide especially in the developed countries, but, very few studies have been conducted in India related to the present study. These studies have lots of implications to understand and generalize the findings of the present study. Some of such studies are mentioned in the following way. Srivastava and Nagar (2011) studied the impact of technology on performance of visually challenged. The study reported that the visually challenged students could at least perform at par with their sighted peers if proper technological based education is given in a supportive environmental context. Rani (2011) studied the importance of psychological factor, namely, emotional intelligence for visually disabled students and its impact on their academic achievement. The investigator concluded that the type of school setting has a significant impact on the emotional intelligence and academic achievement of visually disabled students. Sharda and Ranjan (2011) studied the awareness and attitude of the teachers working in CBSE schools in Coimbatore city towards Inclusive Education and found that there was a significant difference in the awareness level of the teachers based on the educational qualification, and incidence of CWSN in their school. Sharma, Kumar and Gunthey (2011) conducted a study on Computer Assisted Instruction (CAI) on Achievement of Children with Mild Mental Retardation in Learning of Arithmetic Concept. The study reported that computer assisted instructional teaching strategies enhance the ability and achievement level of children with mild mental retardation. UNESCO (2010) also found that many schools, especially in rural and slum areas, are physically inaccessible to some children with disabilities. Julka (2010) undertook an exploratory study of sign language and found that those hearing impaired students who are taught in English or other vernacular languages (here we mean the spoken language of the place in question) are less equipped to face the world outside them, as compared to their peers in other schools where Sign Language (SL) is used. Lekoko and Mukhopadhyay (2008) attempted to explore the practice and preferences of sign languages in the instruction of deaf students of the mainstream secondary schools of Botswana. The use of language for every day communication has been and continues to be an essential element of any teaching and learning environment. Lal and Bali (2007) investigated the effects of visual strategies on development of communication skills in children with Autism and focused on development of comprehension, labeling, description, joint attention and active interaction through visual supports. Visual strategies were found to be effective in the development of communication skills in children across the age range

of 5 to 11 years. Joseph (2003) studied factors influencing language performance of hearing impaired students. The results showed that regular use of a hearing aid, private schools (both aided and unaided), size of the class (up to ten students) and a non-residential set-up had a positive impact on the performance of students. Hastings and Oakford (2003) studied the impact of special needs category (intellectual disabilities versus emotional and behavioral problems) and student teachers' training (being trained to work with either younger or older children) on their attitudes towards inclusion. Results showed that student -teachers' were more negative about the impact of children with emotional and behavioural problems on other children, teachers, and the school environment than they were about children with intellectual disabilities. Advani (2002) has also highlighted the importance of individual differences, need for differentiating curriculum and providing necessary support, need of teaching plus curriculum, support of special aids and appliances, services at school as well as at the teacher-training level through different modes. Kumar and Wilson (1997) discussed the role of computer technology in individualizing the mode of delivery, developing expert tutors, anchoring instruction, integrating science with other subjects, reducing cognitive load on working memory, and motivating students to stay on task. Boudah, Schumacher, and Deshler (1997) highlighted that there is a need for teacher training and follow-up in order to make collaborative classrooms work for secondary students with mild disabilities. Further, they indicated that lack of teacher engagement, despite learning strategies of instruction, will translate into low levels of achievement. Egelston-Dodd and Himmelstein (1996) revealed that the constructivist paradigm, misconceptions, the learning cycle, strategies for teaching deaf students, and assessment of learning for students who are deaf and hard of hearing and presented a model lesson that demonstrates how teachers can provide experiences to close the conceptual gaps for deaf students that provide a common base before launching into new concepts.

III. METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

The present research studied the special learning mechanisms used for educating special needs children in the selected special schools of Assam. The present piece of research is conducted on Govt. as well as NGO based special schools of Assam. The population area of the present study has covered all the special schools of Assam which are meant for teaching the different categories of special needs children such as visual impaired, hearing impaired, mentally retarded, orthopaedically handicapped, multiple handicapped etc. But, the sampling area of the present study is covered by nine special schools from four districts (viz., Dhubri, Kamrup, Dibrugarh and Cachar) of Assam. Random sampling method was followed for selecting the sample of the study.

IV. SAMPLE/PARTICIPANTS

In this study, total nine (9) schools from the four (4) districts: Cachar, Kamrup (M), Dhubri and Dibrugarh were selected for collection of data. While selecting the districts, the researcher has followed purposive sampling method, but while selecting the schools from the districts and participants from the schools, the researcher has followed random sampling method. At first the whole state of Assam has been divided under three socio-geographic zones i.e., South Assam, Lower Assam and Upper Assam. The participants of the study were school principals/ headmasters/ teachers and parents/ guardians from the respective schools. The sample distribution is given below:

Table 1: Description of the sample

SL No	Socio-geographic zones	Name of district	No. of schools	Categories of schools	Name of the schools	No. of principals/ teachers	No. of parents/ guardians
1	South Assam	Cachar	3	NGO	DISHA School	6	5
				NGO	Ujjeban School	8	5
				NGO	Sudhir Ch. Chakravorty Academy for the Blind	6	5
2	Lower Assam	Kamrup (metro)	2	Govt.	Govt. B.D.S. Deaf & Dumb School	18	5
				NGO	Shishu Sarothi School	21	5
		Dhubri	1	NGO	Shishu Sahara Special School	6	5
3	Upper Assam	Dibrugargh	3	NGO	Ashwash School	7	5
				NGO	Blessing School	6	5
				Govt.	Moran Blind School	12	5
					Total	90	45

V. TOOLS USED

The present study is concerned with two objectives. For achieving the requirements of the first objective of the study, a self-developed tool (Interview Schedule) was used for the collection of data. Further, for achieving the second objective of the study two self-developed Information Blank was applied for the collection of data.

VI. PROCEDURE FOR COLLECTION OF DATA

For collecting the data of the present study, at first the researcher made a pilot study in order to have a knowledge on sampling schools and the categories of learners studying therein. After that, the researcher personally visited all the sampling schools for collection of data. For achieving the first objective (i.e., to study the effect of special learning mechanisms on learners' academic achievement) of the study, the researcher collected data from headmaster/teachers of the sampling schools. Further, in order to achieve the second objective (i.e., to know the qualification and training level of the teachers teaching in schools for special children of Assam) of the study, the researcher also collected the information from the principals/headmasters/teachers of the respective schools.

Table 2: Table Containing Tools Used Objective-wise

Sl.	Objectives of the Study	Name of	Name of Respondents
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No		Tools	
1	To study the effect of special learning mechanisms on learners' academic achievement.	Interview Schedule	Principal/Headmaster/T eachers
2	To study the qualification and training level of teachers teaching in schools for special children of Assam	Information Blank	Principal/Headmaster/T eachers

VII. PROCEDURE FOLLOWED FOR ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF DATA

In this study, both qualitative and quantitative methods of analysis of data are followed after securing the views from the participants. The basic quantitative/statistical methods like Mean, percentage, graphical representations of data were used for analysis of data.

VIII. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The major findings of the study are presented objective-wise on the basis of analysis and interpretation of data collected from the participants

Objective- 1: study of the effect of special learning mechanisms on learners' academic achievement.

➤ That out of 9 schools, in 3 schools visually impaired students studied. They were basically taught Braille curriculum through Braille method of instruction. It was also seen that different play activities like- puzzles, blocks, flash chart, Braille chart, abacus are used to teach the students. Some special therapy and medical treatment like eye check-up, ophthalmological test are provided.

➤ Out of 9 schools, in 5 schools hearing impaired students studied. They have been taught general curriculum but followed some special methods of instruction such as- hearing aids, puzzle box, overhead projector, pyramid rings, picture charts and books. Sign language, gesture and lip reading are used as medium of instruction. Audio therapy, speech therapy, lip therapy and general medical treatment are given to the students.

➤ That out of 9 schools, in 4 schools speech impaired students were found and they are offered general curriculum but followed some special learning mechanisms such as lip reading and therapy, speech therapy, use of blocks, puzzles, models etc., to teach the students.

➤ That out of 9 schools, in 2 schools mentally challenged students studied. It was seen that the basic 3Rs are taught to them along with basic skill training such as- toilet training, eating, bathing and dressing training, washing habit training etc. Some special therapies like ball therapy, yoga, meditation, mental therapy are given to the students.

➤ Out of 9 schools, in 2 schools learning disabled students studied and they are taught through various play activities and field visit. Some vocational training like jute carpet making, envelop making, stitching are given to the students for their future economic independence.

➤ The effect of special learning mechanisms reflected that the students of Sudhir Ch. Academy for Blind, Govt. BDS Deaf & Dumb School and Shishu Shahara Special School obtained 92%, 69.98% and 45.5% average marks respectively. The students of Moran Blind School, Ujjeban School and Shishu Sharothi School secured 44.59%, 89.14% and 'A' grade respectively. Further, the students of Ashwas School, Blessing School and DISHA School obtained 50%, 76.25% and 70% average marks respectively.

Objective- 2: Study of the qualification and training level of teachers teaching in schools for special children of Assam

➤ It was seen that in the 9 schools of the study, total 90 teachers are found where 36 (40%) are male and 54 (60%) are female.

➤ In case of job condition of the teachers, out of 90 teachers, 82 (91.11%) teachers were found as permanent and 8 (9.89%) teachers were found as temporary teachers.

➤ In case of qualification of the teachers, out of 90 teachers, 9 (10%) teachers were found as master degree holder, 37 (41.11%) graduate degree holder, 18 (20%) HS/Intermediate passed and 6 (6.67%) teachers were found as matriculation.

➤ In case of experience level of the teachers, out of 90 teachers, 51 (56.67%) teachers were found having 10 years teaching experience, 23 (25.56%) teachers having 10 to 20 years teaching experience and 16 (17.78%) teachers were found having 20 years and above teaching experience.

➤ In case of training level of the teachers, out of 90 teachers, 2 teachers were found M.Ed. (Spl. Ed.), 8 were found B.Ed. (Spl. Ed), 7 were found DHLS, 6 were found DSE, 4 were found CTD, 1 was found HBTB, 1 was found HBTB and MTL, 5 were found both FC and BC, 13 were found FC, 16 were found BC, 2 were found DHT, 2 were found BMMDC, 2 were found DHE, 1 was found DKE, 1 was found DC, 1 was found DT, 2 were found Art training, 1 was found ophthalmologist, 1 was found physiotherapist and 13 were found untrained teachers.

The present piece of research work is a significant attempt in the area of special education. Many other studies have also been carried out previously by other researchers in the same area/field. The result of those studies in one way or the other is related with the findings of the present study. For example, the finding of the studies conducted by Sharda and Ranjan (2011), Gunthey (2011), Julka (2010), Lekoko and Mukhopadhyay (2008), and Oakford (2003) are closely connected to the findings of the present study. Some of the results/findings of the present study are: special learning materials and aids are used for teaching, providing vocational training to be self sufficient, most of the teachers are trained, use sign language and gestures, use Braille book etc. The results of the study conducted by the above mentioned researchers are related to the findings of the present study. For example, Julka (2010) explored that hearing impaired students learnt better in sign language rather than in English or other vernacular languages. The findings of Lekoko and Mukhopadhyay (2008) revealed that the practice of language for every day communication has been and continues to be an essential element of any teaching and learning environment. Lal and Bali (2007) outlined that the visual strategies were found to be an effective medium in the development of communication skills in children. From the overall discussion and findings of the present study, it is seen that learning mechanisms have a great impact on learner's academic achievement and educational development in the schools for special children of Assam.

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