

A study of the Profile and Teaching methods applied in Special Schools in Mizoram

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Abstract

Current ethics call for inclusive education where in all students are accepted under one roof. This inclusion ranges from race, language and even gender to the physical and mental abilities of the child. However, before the concept of inclusion was seclusion where in special schools were set up for the physically and mentally challenged children. Special schools are schools that are meant for differently abled children. Since they have different abilities that diverge from what is accepted as normal, certain adaptations are also required for their successful education. Therefore, the buildings allotted to them, the kind of experiences the teachers teaching them have, the motivation and attitude of teachers, the whole ambience has very important significance. The present study was conducted in Mizoram, a small state in the north east part of India, within Aizawl district, the state capital namely: Gilead Special School, Special Blind School, Epatha Special School, Shining Star Special School and Redeem Garden (School for the Hearing Impaired) in order to prepare a profile of these special schools along with the teaching methods employed. The findings showed that there was more private and non- governmental support for the development of these schools, provisions were made for their vocational education and that sound buildings were provided for the special children. Regarding teaching methods, the study found that most of the schools were bilingual in their medium of instruction, meaning that at they used the local language as well as English for teaching. The study found that schools were found to have adequate teaching aids with respect to different categories of their disabilities and only a small minority of special schools reported that they had a problem in teaching differently abled children.

Key terms: *Special schools, Special educator, Children, Special, Differently abled*

Introduction:

Every person is different, which makes them exceptional. It is believed that education has the power to influence and advance a person's overall growth. It is education that has materialized the dreams of millions of human beings and thus enhancing their quality of life. Due to individual differences, some people need more relevant or appropriate teaching than what is often offered in formal and informal educational settings. Special education standards were created to assist and fulfil the different needs of people. So, the main objective of special education is to develop and enhance the social skills of individuals.

Special Education is a specially designed instruction to meet the unusual needs of special children. It requires special materials, teaching and training techniques or equipment and facilities. The prime aim of special education is to draw out and strengthen the special children's abilities. Related services like special transportation, psychological and medical assessment, physical and occupational therapy, medical treatment and guidance and counselling go hand in hand with special education (Esther, 2018).

The PWD (Persons with Disabilities) Act, 1995 listed seven conditions of disabilities such as blindness, low vision, leprosy cured, hearing impairment, locomotor disability, mental retardation, and mental illness. In the RPWD (Rights of Person with Disabilities) Act, 2016, the list has been expanded from 7 to 21 conditions.

It is very challenging to teach students who have special educational needs, or SEN. It entails carrying out a teaching procedure and giving students access to resources that are appropriate for their ability level. The scholastic requirements of each individual determine this. This means creating a unique, purpose-driven curriculum of competencies for every student based on their selections from the core curriculum. Curriculum alteration is the term for this. In addition, students must be provided with resources and equipment that meet their needs (Fuertes et al., 2008).

Special education received a slow but sure boost after the NPE 1986 which clearly spelled out that provisions should be made for the education of children with special needs along with the normal children. However, even after there was a Plan of Action in 1992, special education was still behind other countries as shown by previous comparative studies. The Rights of Persons with Disabilities (RPWD) Act of 2016 works to advance and safeguard the

dignity and rights of individuals with disabilities in a range of spheres of life, including social, legal, cultural, political, and educational. More recently, the NEP 2020 clearly states a need for 'Barrier-free access to education for all children with disability'. The NEP 2020 will support schools and school grounds by assigning special educators who are qualified to teach students with disabilities and by providing resources to incorporate children with disabilities. States will get funding to build the necessary upgrades and modifications for female and transgender youngsters (such as restroom construction, sanitation, bicycles, as well as subject to money transactions).

This immediately brings to mind the need for an inclusive education system. However, this does not minimize the importance of the special schools that have existed in different parts of the country catering to various kinds of disability. It is from their examples that inclusive education can learn mostly from, if India is to truly apply the concept of inclusive education in schools.

The present study was undertaken so as to find out the status of special schools within the district of Aizawl in Mizoram, which is a state located in the north east region of India. There are 5 special schools in the Aizawl district viz., Gilead Special School, Special Blind School, Epatha Special School, Shining Star Special School and Redeem Garden (School for the Hearing Impaired). The profile study majorly concentrated on the infrastructure of the school where the design and any provision made for differently abled children were studied. Teaching methods were also studied in detail and care was taken to find out the use and implementation of various teaching methods to cater to different kind of disabilities.

Objectives:

- 1) To prepare a profile of special schools within Aizawl district.
- 2) To study the teaching methods applied in special schools.

Review of related studies:

Fuertes, et al. (2008) finds that the adoption of cutting-edge instructional tools creates new avenues for engaging with pupils. They suggest making use of this opportunity to assist in the education of kids who require special education. They examine the most recent developments

in instructional assistance technologies, concentrating on the gaps in the literature. They offer a fresh framework to support educators at every stage of the teaching process and explain how Proyecto Aprender, an educational initiative for kids with learning challenges, is utilizing it.

Peña, et al. (2023) used a descriptive correlational methodology in their study to look into the ways in which teachers' profiles, their use of assistive technology, and their influence on teaching exceptional learners in public schools work together. To find out how teachers' profiles, their use of assistive technology, and their impact on students with exceptionalities, 63 convenience sample teachers in Mandaue City, Philippines who had taught exceptional students in inclusive and self-contained classrooms were surveyed. The results showed that the perceived efficacy of middle-to-high technology was influenced by the characteristics of teachers, specifically their income and level of education. Teachers noted that students' freedom, skills, and involvement has a positive impact with the use of assistive technology.

Tabay, et al. identify controls in their study by looking at the Special Education Program's effective teaching strategies while taking contextual variables into account. The main objective of special education can be identified and attained, according to the study, by using effective teaching methodologies. In support of diverse educational teaching methodologies and best practices, these examined the effects of personal traits. To enhance the caliber and process of education, the special education teacher must apply engaging and productive teaching strategies in the classroom.

Yuwono and Okech demonstrates that when teachers work with Learners with Disabilities (LwDs) and Others with Special Needs (OSNs) in large groups, class size is a significant obstacle to those poorly qualified teachers. According to another study, curriculum design presents a difficulty for teachers, leaving them unsure of how to approach the situation effectively. Researchers have also discovered that average class size (teacher-to-student ratio) presents challenges for teachers. It has also been discovered that the resources available in the classroom, the way laws on education for LwDs and OSNs are implemented, and the setting of the classroom all directly and indirectly affect the contributions made by the teachers.

Looking at the findings of the study done by various researchers in different parts of the world, it is apparent that a wholesome study which encompasses different aspects of special

education is needed. This is why the present study has been undertaken so as to fill in some research gaps.

Operational definition of terms: In the present study, the meaning of certain terms are as follows:

Profile:

- 1) Infrastructure: this indicates the type of building as well as various equipment that are used in a particular school.
- 2) Management: this could be either government or private schools.
- 3) Years active: this indicates the active years of the school from the establishment.
- 4) Types of disability they cater to: this indicates the types of disabilities the school take care of.
- 5) Provision for vocationalization: this indicates the programme offered by the school to the differently abled students for their improvement in life skills and for job.
- 6) Special schools: The schools which have specially been set up of children with special needs.

Teaching methods:

- 1) Medium of teaching.
- 2) Learning aids used for learning difficulties.
- 3) Learning aids used for hearing impaired.
- 4) Learning aids used for visually impaired.
- 5) Assistive devices used for sensory impairment.

Delimitation: The study is delimited to Aizawl district.

Methodology

The present study was undertaken by survey method, the population comprised of 5 special schools and all these special schools were studied and therefore no sampling was done.

Data was gathered by means of Interview Schedule prepared by the researcher. Qualitative data analysis was used and percentages were taken so as to give a gestalt view of the whole picture.

Analysis of Data and Findings:

- 1) Findings on Objective No.1: To study the profile of special schools within Aizawl district.

The following tables show the findings of the research on the profile of special schools under various dimensions which have been spelled out in the operational definitions of terms:

i. Infrastructure

Table - 1: Types of Building

Types of Building	
RCC	ASSAM TYPE
80%	20%

Table-1 indicates that a large 80% of the schools were Reinforced Cement Concrete (RCC) while another 20% were of Assam Type.

ii. Years active

Table - 2: Years Active

YEARS ACTIVE			
0-5	5-10	10-15	15 above
40%	20%		40%

As seen in Table - 2, 40 % of the special school was 0-5 years active, another 20% reached to 5-10 years active where another 40% of the schools were active more than 15 years.

This indicates the consistency and smooth functioning of most institutions of the district and their educational provisions to special needs students.

iii. Management

Table - 3: Types of school

TYPES OF SCHOOL			
GOVERNMENT	PRIVATE	PRIVATE AIDED	NGO's
-	40%	20%	40%

An analysis of Table-3 clearly indicates that there was no institution for differently abled children that was run by the government. While 40% of them were managed by private bodies, a small 20% was run by private bodies that received aids from the government. A healthy 40% of these special schools were managed by NGO's.

It was rather disappointing to find such a dismal performance on the part of the government in terms of management of special schools within the district where the capital of the state is located.

iv. Types of disability

Table - 4: Types of disability

TYPES OF DISABILITY										TOTAL
H.I (%)	V.I (%)	I.D (%)	M.I (%)	L.D (%)	ASD %	C.P (%)	S&LD (%)	M.D & DB (%)	OTHERS %	%
60	20	20	20	20	40	20	40	-	20	100

As seen from Table-4, it was found that 60% of the schools attended to hearing impairment, 20% of them looked after visual impairment, another 20% of the special schools attended to intellectual disability, mental illness constituted 20% of the population, another small 20% attended to locomotor disability, 40% of them took care of autism spectrum disorder, cerebral palsy were 20%, speech and language disability occupied 40%, where multiple disabilities including deaf-blindness was nil and other disability constitute 20% which was learning disability.

There was no special school that took care of all the impairments that are recognised by the rehabilitation council of India. However, it was found that more than one disability was taken care by one institution.

v. Provision for vocationalization

Table - 5: Provision for vocationalization

PROVISION FOR VOCATIONALIZATION								
Auto-mobile	Carpentry	Painting	Weaving	Knitting	Com puter	Paper products	Bamboo products	Any other
20%	-	40%	-	20%	20%	80%	-	20%

With regards to the category of divisions on provision for vocationalization shown on Table-5, it was found that 20% of the schools attended to automobile training, 40% of them provided training in painting, another 20% gave knitting lessons, a small 20% imparted training in computer, quite a large 80% of the population were devoted to training related to paper products, other training as such tailoring occupied 20% of the population.

It was found that there was no such training given to carpentry, weaving and bamboo products. As many children with special needs could benefit from these kinds of vocation, it would be a huge improvement if these activities were included in the weekly activities.

2. Findings on Objective No.2: To study the teaching methods applied in special schools

The following are the findings related to teaching methods applied in special schools:

i. Medium of instruction: According to the Statistical handbook of Mizoram, the following languages given in Table-6 are spoken by the people. In accordance to this, the interview schedule had the option for these languages.

Table - 6: Medium of teaching

MEDIUM OF TEACHING						
English	Hindi	Mizo	Mara	Lai	Hmar	Bilingual (English & Mizo)

-	-	20%	-	-	-	80%
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As shown by Table-6, only a small portion of 20% use Mizo language as a medium of instruction while a greater 80% of schools use a mixed English & Mizo language for teaching.

ii. Learning aids for learning disabilities: The table below are list of teaching used by teachers/special educators to educate students with learning difficulties.

Table - 7: Learning aids for learning disabilities

LEARNING AIDS FOR LEARNING DISABILITIES					
Talking books	Supplementary materials	Study guides	Graphic depiction for content enrichment	Mnemonic devices	Sentence strips, Braille slates and stylus
20%	40%	20%	20%	20%	20%

Table-7 reveals that 20% of the school used Talking books to educate students with learning difficulties, where a much more 40% use supplementary materials. Study guides populated 20%, graphic depiction for content enrichment occupied 20%, a small 20% of them use mnemonic devices; another 20% uses sentence strips, braille slates and stylus.

iii. Learning aids used for hearing impaired: Below table comprises learning aids used for hearing impaired.

Table - 8: Learning aids used for hearing impaired

LEARNING AIDS USED FOR HEARING IMPAIRED		
Early intervention	Sign language and communication	Teaching learning materials
60%	40%	40%

As seen in Table-8, 60% of the school population provides early intervention program, 40 % of the school engaged to sign language and communication, another 40% used teaching learning materials for instruction.

iv. Learning aids used for visually impaired: The table below are list of learning aids used by teachers/special educator to educate students with visual impairment.

Table - 9: Learning aids used for visually impaired

Cane	Abacus	Taylor Frame	Braille slate & stylus
-	20%	20%	20%

Table-9 reveals that 20% of the school used Abacus, Taylor frame was also used by another 20%, a small 20% of the school used Braille slate & stylus. Studies shows that none of the visually impaired students used cane for their mobility.

v. Devices used for sensory impairment: The table below represents devices used by special schools for sensory impaired students.

Table - 10: Devices used for sensory impairment

Devices used for sensory impairment		
Models, toys	Talking calculator, clocks, audible ball	Geometric shapes, building blocks
40%	20%	40%

Table-10, illustrates that devices like models & toys were used by 40% of the special schools, 20% of the schools made use of talking calculator, clocks and audible ball, and another 40% of the school employed geometric shapes and building blocks.

vi. Problems regarding teaching: Information was gathered if schools encountered any problems regarding teaching.

Table no. 11: Problems regarding teaching

PROBLEMS REGARDING TEACHING	
Yes	No
20%	80%

Table-11 indicates that a small portion of 20% of the school population struggle with problems in teaching. It was found that there was school which have inadequate Teaching Learning Materials (TLM's). The other large 80% of the school population did not encounter problems with regards to classroom teaching. However, this was how they reported and not as perceived by the researcher. Therefore, in view of the absence of proper buildings, much needed facilities for teaching, it was doubtful that some special schools did not have problems.

Conclusion:

Even as the rest of the world is progressing in terms of education for children with special needs, in a small district like Aizawl district which is the remote part of India, it was found that special schools had a lot of growing up to do. In light of the need for special education to be included in the so-called normal schools, it is especially important for these special schools to be a beacon of light for the rest of the schools. It is only by looking at their practices that special adjustments can really be implemented in schools. What needs to be kept in mind is that if the national policy is geared towards a certain direction, provisions including financial support need to be provided so that policies may be implemented. Monitoring may also be done to ensure the best implementation of these policies. Therefore, the present findings may not be so optimistic with regards to the general profile and the methods of teaching employed in these schools within Aizawl district, they have clearly highlighted the need for more financial back up as well as new ideas in teaching methods which may be incorporated by them.

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