

Status of implementation of the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act with reference of Inclusive Education in elementary schools: A Study

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Abstract

The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education (RTE) Act, 2009 heralded a new epoch in the Indian Education system, specifically in the context of inclusive education. The RTE Act was enacted to ensure that the Constitutional Right of being the benefit of education at the elementary level is not denied to any children. The Act intended to eradicate all the problems related to elementary education system in India. Inclusive Education, as a concept, advocates for equal education for every child without any discrimination concerning the child's gender, caste, creed, race, color, ability, or disability. Inclusive education is a process of addressing and responding to the special needs of all learners by increasing participation in learning and reducing exclusion from education. The RTE Act, 2009 promulgates the tenets of inclusive education and institutes free and compulsory elementary education for all children in the age group 6- 14 years. It is regarded as a bellwether for enlisting need-based and child-centric teaching-learning aids and pedagogies to be employed while educating Children with Special Needs (CWSN). This study, in particular, focuses on estimating the outreach of the teaching-learning scaffolds, assistive devices and equipment that RTE has mandated in the context of inclusive education for children with special needs. To gauge the implementation and the outreach of the various learning aids being used for teaching and learning Children with Special Educational Needs, an intensive study of a randomly selected sample of sixty elementary schools from the four blocks of Lucknow district was undertaken. The analysis of the collated data revealed that more rapid, as well as expansive strides, need to be taken in the context of equipping the schools with state-of-the-art teaching-learning equipment. The present study posits a set of recommendations in this regard which will add to the state government's mission of Universalization of Elementary Education.

Key terms: Implementation, provisions and facilities, RTE Act, Children with Special Needs, Inclusive Education, elementary schools

Introduction

The concept of inclusive education is based on the concept of education for all. In 2009, UNESCO released a document containing guidelines, rationale, and explanations for models of inclusive education. It is written for policy-makers, schools, educators, community leaders, and learners to promote a holistic model of education reform. The Constitution of India also deems Education to be the fundamental right of every citizen of India. Education is the edifice that strengthens the physical, professional, and ethical moorings of an individual besides significantly enhancing the quality of one's life, health, and living standards. In this league, the dictum of inclusive education ensures access to quality education for all students by effectively meeting their diverse needs during a way that's responsive, accepting, respectful and supportive. Inclusive education is administered during a common learning environment; that's, an academic setting where students from different backgrounds and with different abilities learn together in an inclusive environment. Common learning

environments are used for the majority of the student's regular instruction hours and may include classrooms, libraries, gyms, performance theatres, music rooms, cafeterias, playgrounds, and the local community. A common learning environment is a forum where students with intellectual disabilities or other special needs learn along with their peers. Students who are educated in such an ecosystem will develop a more encompassing and humane attitude and grow up to remove barriers and that lead to exclusion. Some of the defining aspects of

Effective Common Learning Environments include

It enables each student to completely participate within the learning environment that's designed for all students and is shared with peers within the chosen educational setting; provide a positive climate, promote a way of belonging and ensure student progress toward appropriate personal, social, emotional, and academic goals; pedagogies employed are responsive to individual learning needs by providing sufficient levels of support and applying student-centred teaching practices and principles. Foster an all-inclusive forum wherein the instruction is designed to be delivered to students of mixed abilities and with their peer group in the community school while catering to their individual needs as a learner, and also use teaching methodologies for the majority of the student's regular instruction hours. More specifically, in the Indian context, inclusive education gained precedence with the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education (RTE) Act, 2009. The RTE Act, 2009 was framed to ensure that the Constitutional Right of being educated at the elementary level is not denied to any citizen of the country. The Act is based on the 86th Amendment in the Constitution through which Article 21(A) was inserted after Article 21 of the Constitution. Article 21(A) pronounces that the State is duty-bound to provide free and compulsory education to all children in the age group of six to fourteen years. Furthermore, the Act ordained a revised set of guidelines that necessitates the pursuance of improvised and need-centric pedagogical approaches and teaching-learning aids for the children with special needs. To empower a child who has special needs through education in an inclusive setup would include providing the child with the right study aids and infrastructural scaffolds facilitated by expert guidance. Furthermore, as per the tenets of the Common Learning Environment, it is also important to ensure the holistic development of children with special abilities and different levels of learning abilities in the same classroom with no bias towards any child in any scenario. Drawing inspiration from the RTE Act, 2009, the Central and the State governments along with teachers, trainers, and educators are dedicating their efforts towards realizing the goals of Universalization of Elementary Education (UEE) for the children with special educational needs.

Related studies

Against this backdrop, the present study is committed to examining the changes that have been incorporated in the elementary schools vis-à-vis the provision of teaching-learning equipment and utilities for the CWSN. The core objective of the study seeks to address the following research premise:

Hunt and Goetz (1997) reviewed nineteen research investigations of inclusive educational programs, practices and outcomes for students with severe disabilities. Their meta-analysis revealed that students with severe disabilities were actually also includable in ordinary schools and that they may achieve positive academic and learning outcomes contrary to the unfounded fears or concerns held by many stakeholders. In this case, school counsellors may need to mount a lot of sensitization or awareness campaigns for school administrators, regular teachers, non-disabled students and parents of nondisabled students to change their negative attitudes in the opposite direction. This is important because the success of both inclusive education school counselling will depend on all these parties concerned.

Booth & Ainscow (2002) in their study suggested the importance of the index for inclusion which is a source designed to build on school based knowledge and existing practices and to challenge the school to move forward. The index invites school communities to reduce barriers to learning and participation through a collaborative investigation of schools cultures, policies and practices and set new priorities for development.

Kaur (2013) studied the policy perspective regarding universalization of elementary education. Article 45 of the constitution of India provided a basic framework in this direction. Afterwards various Commissions and Committees appointed by the Government of India also gave recommendations to universalize elementary education and lots of programmes such as DPEP, SSA were initiated in this direction. The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009 is a comprehensive and detailed piece of legislation which includes the provision related to free and compulsory education of all the children in age group of 6-14 years as fundamental right. But despite all these policy initiatives and government efforts the goal of Universalization of elementary education remained vague.

Soni and Rahman (2013) conducted a research on status of implementation of RTE Act, 2009 in context of disadvantaged children at elementary stage. Several categories of children with disabilities have special needs depending on the nature of disability. Therefore, special aids and appliances, educational teaching learning materials, special teacher support and infrastructural modifications are required to ensure RTE to these children. Awareness of inclusive education at all levels - functionaries, head teachers/teachers, parents and community is of paramount importance and urgent steps in this direction are indispensable. Shortage of teachers, alarming pupil-teacher ratio, other official duties assigned to teachers training programmes, duties in block level office, making Aadhar cards and voter Cards and government surveys etc. no training of regular teachers in education of children with disabilities and non-availability of special teacher support on daily basis are challenges in the implementation of RTE. Poor infrastructure, non-availability of appropriate furniture for children with disabilities, non-availability of special aids and appliances, poor quality of aids and appliances for children with locomotors disabilities are major challenges in fulfilment of RTE to these children.

The studies related to RTE Act indicated that it was expected that the Act would be an effective instrument for any child to demand her basic entitlement, reveal that in most of the cases, as was observed, the senior teachers were less aware about the RTE Act, 2009. The review also highlighted that there existed a lacuna of research evidences about the level and extent of awareness, extent of implementation of inclusive education in elementary inclusive schools and barriers in the implementation of inclusive education in elementary schools for children with special needs.

Research Questions

- What are the implementation strategies of the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act concerning provisions and facilities in elementary schools of Lucknow?
- Are the schools providing education to children with special needs through the use of essential aids teaching learning aids and assistive devices as and when required, to meet their educational needs?
- Are the schools ensuring basic prerequisites in terms of infrastructure and mid day meal?

Objectives

- To study the implementation strategies of the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act about provisions and facilities in elementary schools of Lucknow.
- To study the schools providing education to children with special needs through the use of essential teaching learning aids and assistive devices as and when required, to meet their educational needs.

- To study the schools ensuring basic prerequisites in terms of infrastructure and mid day meal.

Research method

By seeing the nature of the data, the researcher used the survey method of research.

Population

Surveying research to encompass the whole population would not have been a feasible measure. Therefore, this research has enlisted a sample representative of the population. The population of the present research comprised of elementary schools selected of Lucknow district of the Uttar Pradesh state.

Sample

The study encapsulates those schools that have an enrolment of children with special educational needs. The data has been collated from sixty schools from the four blocks of Lucknow. Purposive sampling was used by the researcher.

Tools used

To identify the areas to be covered, the researcher has reviewed the available literature related to the problem under study. Various standardized checklists were examined in the existing literature and none of them were found to be suitable for this study. Therefore, the researcher used a self-developed school observation checklist to study the implementation of the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act about provisions and facilities for children with special needs in elementary schools.

Statistical techniques employed

The researcher employed a percentage method to analyze the data.

Findings

For the above objective, the researcher collected data through school observation checklist regarding provisions and facilities provided in the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act from the elementary schools of Lucknow. The percentage analysis and interpretation of data is being presented in table 1 to 6:

Table-1
Availability of teaching learning material and assistive devices for visually impaired students in elementary schools

Sr. No.	Parameters	Number of Schools	Yes	%	No	%
1.	Reading material	60	0	0	60	100
2.	Braille books	60	0	0	60	100
3.	Large print books	60	0	0	0	0
4.	Magnifying glasses	60	46	76.67	14	23.33
5.	Devices related to writing	60	24	40	36	60
6.	Braille writing slate	60	0	0	60	100
7.	Brailler	60	0	0	60	100
8.	Bold lined notebooks for low vision students	60	35	58.33	25	41.67
9.	Mobility aids	60	0	0	60	100
10.	Folding cane	60	0	0	60	100
11.	Long cane	60	0	0	60	100
12.	Computational devices	60	0	0	60	100
13.	Abacus	60	40	66.67	20	33.33
14.	Geometry set	60	45	75	15	25

The above table 1 reveals about the information collected through school observation checklist by the researcher related to the availability of Teaching Learning Material (TLM)

and assistive devices available for visually impaired students in selected elementary schools. It emerges from above analysis that almost all the sampled schools do not have the suggested and prescribed teaching learning material and assistive devices; reading related material, braille, braille books, large print books, braille writing slate, mobility aids, folding cane, long cane, computational devices that are used by visually impaired students.

It emerges from above analysis that only 77% schools have magnifying glasses for low vision students, 40% schools have devices related to writing, 58% schools have bold lined notebooks, 67% schools have mathematical device abacus and only 75% schools have geometry set used by visually impaired students.

Therefore, the researcher concluded that, almost all the elementary schools do not have the required number of teaching learning material and assistive devices for visually impaired students. Availability of teaching learning material and assistive devices for visually impaired students in elementary schools are shown below in figure 1:

Figure-1

Showing availability of teaching learning material and assistive devices for visually impaired students in elementary schools

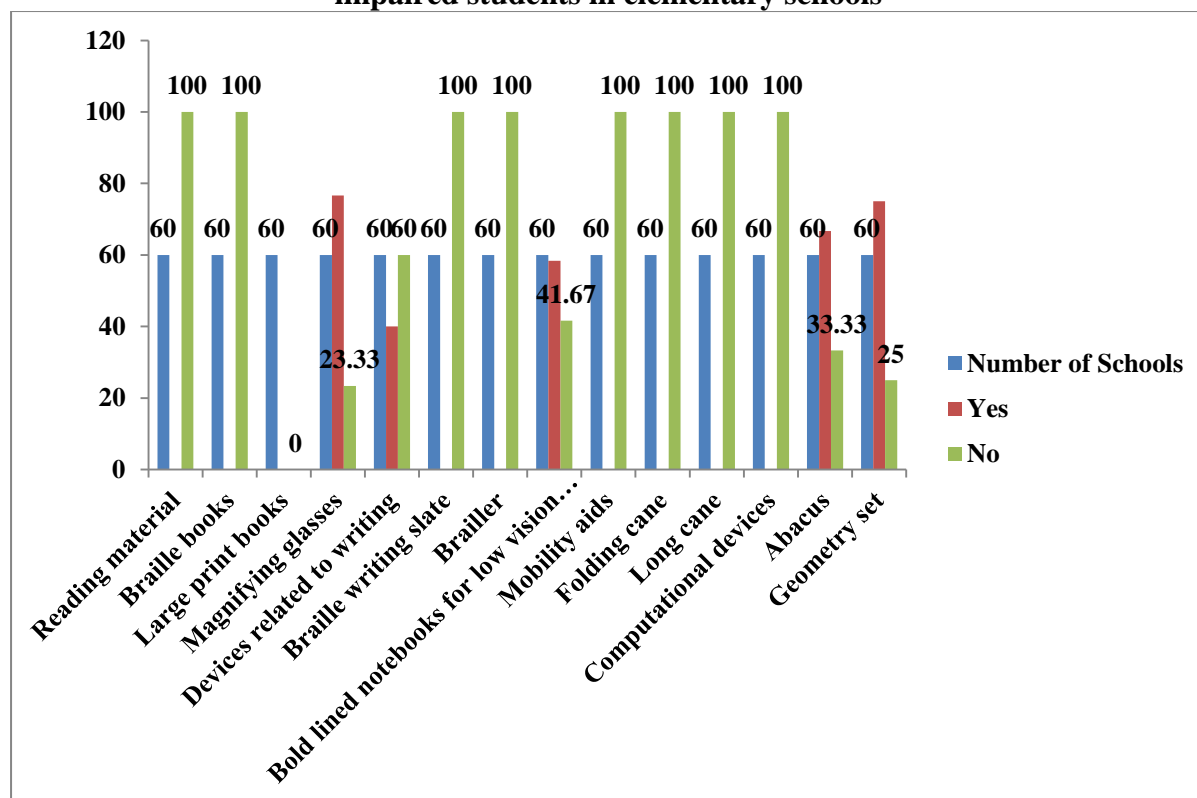


Table-2

Availability of assistive devices for hearing impaired students in elementary schools

Sr. No.	Parameters	Number of Schools	Yes	%	No	%
1.	Speech trainer	60	23	38	37	62
2.	Individual hearing aids	60	0	0	60	100

The above table 2 depicts the availability of assistive devices for hearing impaired students in selected elementary schools. It emerges from above analysis that almost all the sampled schools do not have the individual and group hearing aids for the children with hearing impairment. Only 38% schools have a speech trainer for the hearing impaired students.

Thus, the it can be concluded that almost all the elementary schools do not have the required assistive devices for hearing impaired children. Status of availability of assistive devices for hearing impaired students in elementary schools is presented below in figure 2:

Figure-2

Showing availability of assistive devices for hearing impaired students in elementary schools

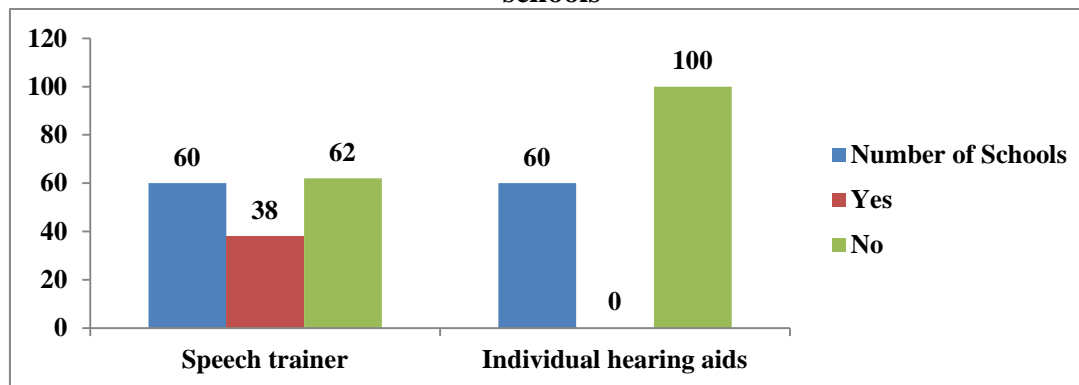


Table-3

Availability of teaching learning material and assistive devices for orthopedically handicapped students in elementary schools

Sr. No.	Parameters	Number of Schools	Yes	%	No	%
1.	Tricycle	60	0	0	60	100
2.	Thick pens	60	30	50	30	50
3.	Crutches	60	24	40	36	60
4.	Wheel chair	60	24	40	36	60
5.	Artificial limbs	60	24	40	36	60

Table 3, depicted the availability of teaching learning material and assistive devices for orthopedically handicapped students in selected elementary schools. It has been noticed that almost all the sampled schools do not have adequate number of tricycle and other assistive devices for orthopedically handicapped children.

Further, analysis of data revealed that only 50% schools have thick pens, 40% schools have crutches, wheel chair and artificial limbs for the orthopedically handicapped students.

Status of availability of teaching learning material and assistive devices for orthopedically handicapped students in elementary schools is presented below in figure 3:

Figure-3

Showing availability of teaching learning material and assistive devices for orthopedically handicapped students in elementary schools

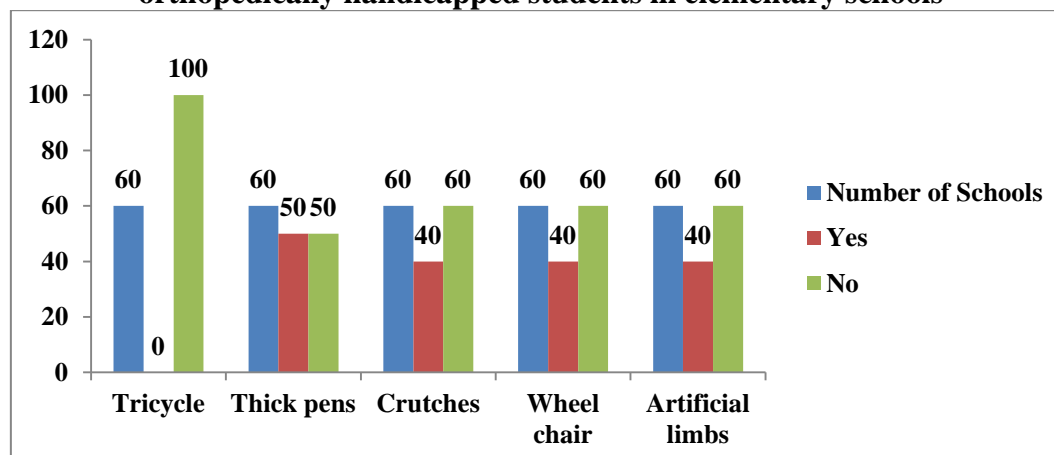


Table-4
Availability of Teaching Learning Material and Assistive Devices for Intellectually Disabled Students in Elementary Schools

S. No.	Parameters	Number of Schools	Yes	%	No	%
1.	Appropriate teaching aids for Intellectually Disabled	60	35	58.33	25	41.67
2.	Concrete models	60	30	50	30	50

It can be seen from above table 4, that the information collected through school observation checklist by the researcher related to the availability of Teaching Learning Material and assistive devices for the Intellectually Disabled students in selected elementary schools. From analysis of data it can be revealed that only 58% schools have appropriate teaching aids for intellectually disabled students and 50% schools only have the concrete models for intellectually disabled children.

Finally, the researcher concluded that, almost all the elementary schools do not have the required teaching learning material, assistive devices and other facilities for the children who are intellectually disabled. Availability of teaching learning material and assistive devices for intellectually disabled students is shown below in figure 4.5:

Figure-4
Showing Availability of Teaching Learning Material and Assistive Devices for Intellectually Disabled Students in Elementary Schools

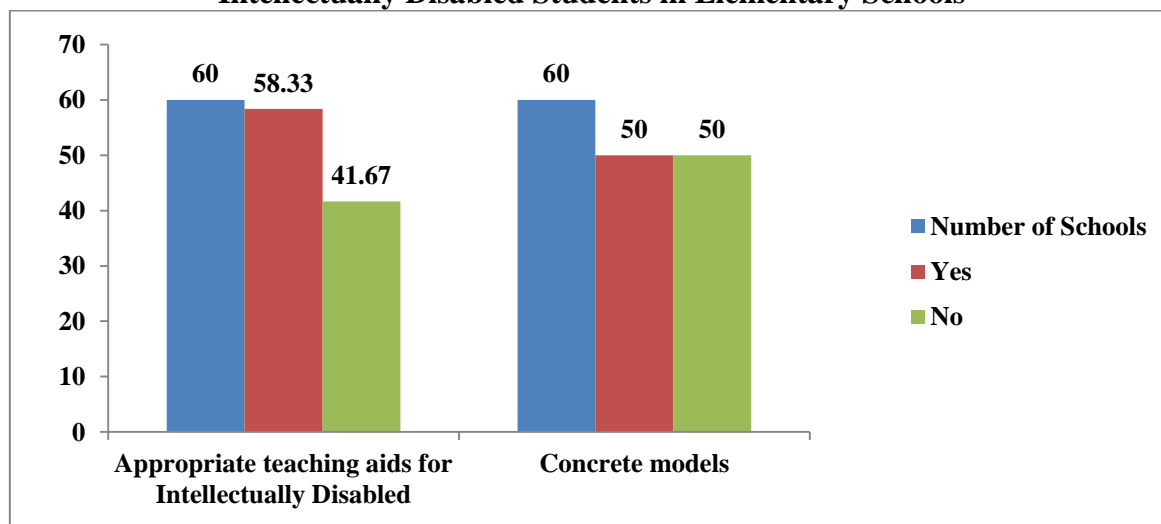


Table-5
Availability of School Infrastructure

Sr. No.	Parameters	Number of Schools	Yes	%	No	%
1.	Number of rooms in the schools according to the norms	60	48	80	12	20
2.	Drinking water	60	50	83.33	10	16.67
3.	Disabled friendly toilets	60	0	0	60	100
4.	Separate toilets for boys and girls	60	40	66.67	20	33.33
5.	Ramps with railing	60	45	75	15	25
6.	Playground	60	48	80	12	20
7.	Boundary wall for security	60	50	83.33	10	16.67

Table 5, reveals about that the availability of school infrastructure for the children with disabilities as per the norms in selected elementary schools. Analysis of data revealed that all

the schools do not have adequate infrastructure as mandated by RTE Act, 2009 for the students with disabilities.

Further, it has been identified that only 80% schools have required number of rooms according to the norms, 83% schools have drinking water facilities, 67% schools have separate toilets for boys and girls, but most of the toilets are not in working condition. As revealed from the analysis of data that 75% of the schools have ramps with railing but it is not according to the norms for the students with disabilities. Only 80% schools have a playground, but it is not appropriate for the students with disabilities, and only 83% schools have boundary wall for security purposes.

Finally, the researcher inferred and summates that almost all the elementary schools do not have the appropriate infrastructure facilities for the children with disability. Detail description of school infrastructure available for children with disabilities in elementary schools is presented below in figure 5:

Figure-5
Showing Availability of School Infrastructure

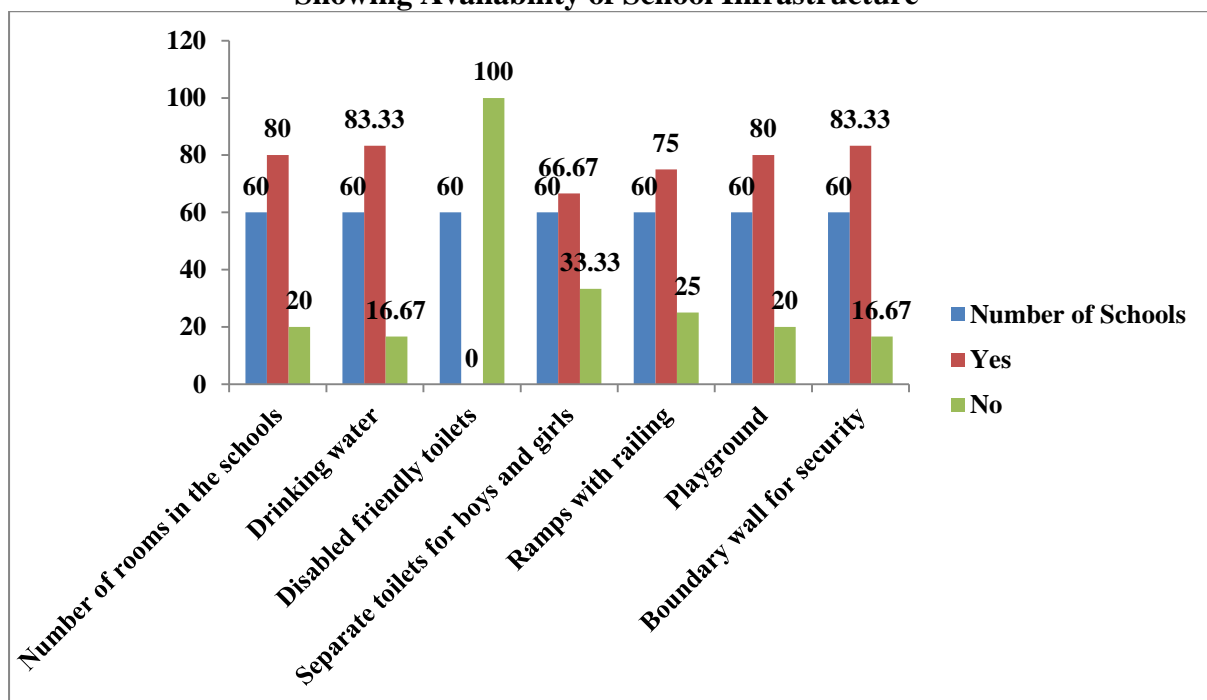


Table-6
Status of Mid-Day Meal Provided in Elementary Schools

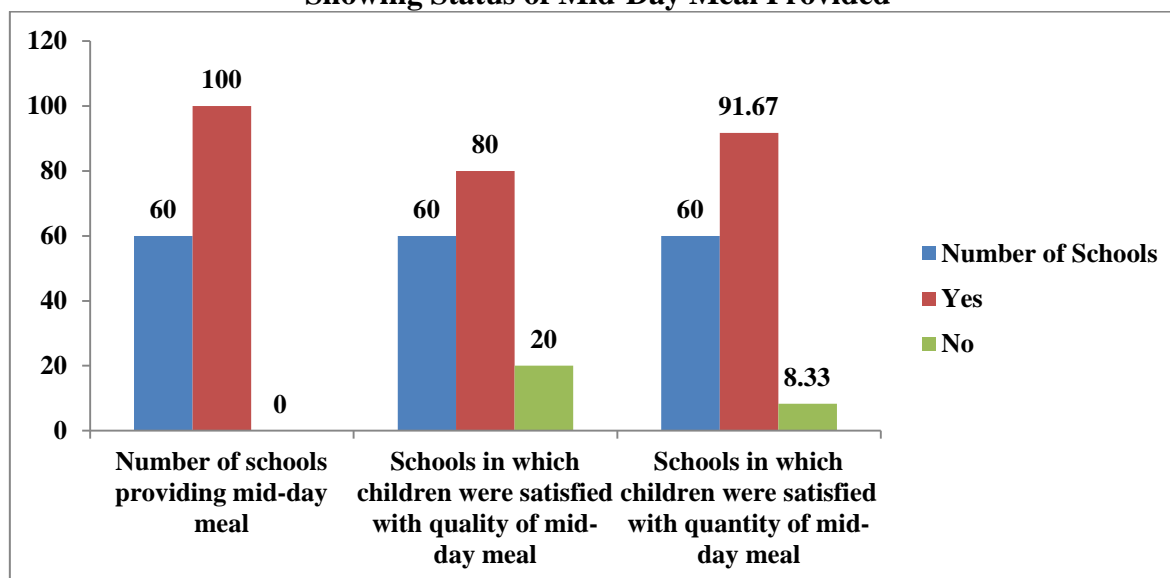
Sr. No.	Parameters	Number of Schools	Yes	%	No	%
1.	Number of schools providing mid-day meal	60	60	100	0	0
2.	Schools in which children were satisfied with quality of mid-day meal	60	48	80	12	20
3.	Schools in which children were satisfied with quantity of mid-day meal	60	55	91.67	5	8.33

The above table 6 presented the status of mid-day meal provided in elementary schools. It emerges from above analysis that all the schools (100%) are providing mid-day meals to all children. Further, only 80% students were found to be satisfied with the quality of mid-day

meal provided and on the other hand 92% students were reported to be satisfied with the quantity of the mid-day meal.

Finally, the researcher concluded that most of the elementary schools are providing mid-day meals to the children and they are almost satisfied with the quality and quantity of the food provided. Detail description and status of mid-day meal provided for all children in elementary schools is presented below in figure 6:

Figure-6
Showing Status of Mid-Day Meal Provided



Recommendations

A thorough analysis of the data obtained in this research establishes the fact that most of the schools are underequipped and lack the desired number of aids to cater to the protégés who are differently-abled. Hence, the study proposes the following recommendations to draw the attention of the government and authorities at all levels along with the educators and the parents of children with special needs:

A mechanism of internal and external audit to identify, procure and maintain an inventory of all teaching and learning equipment and assistive devices for CWSN is an imminent requirement. The school authorities, as well as the state governments, must collaborate for this audit mechanism. Consistent campaigns by the specialists working in the domain of developing learning tools for CWSN must be part of the teaching-learning process. Such forums will sensitize the administrators, teachers and parents about the state-of-the-art learning aids and infrastructure that can enhance the learners' potentials. The regular teachers, special educators as well as the rehabilitation professionals working with CWSN must be trained at regular intervals to ensure optimum utilization of the learning scaffolds. Regular inspections and monitoring must be conducted to gauge the levels of compliance in schools in the context of RTE Acts provisions for CWSN. School authorities can be sent an advisory regarding the need to foster and maintain a Common Learning Environment that empowers all children, irrespective of their physical abilities and learning potentials.

Conclusion

Children with special needs and their education is the responsibility of not just the parents, teachers, community or the government. The mission to educate each child at the elementary level, regardless of the child's abilities, can only be achieved through the collective will of the citizens. Children with special needs must be empowered with an enabling environment that is sensitive to their needs for appropriate, workable, and easy-to-use study aids, assistive devices, and infrastructural supports. This is not just a transient phase; such changes would

need consistent meticulousness in ensuring that RTE, Act becomes a life-enhancing force for children with special needs being educated at the elementary level.

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