



CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL NEEDS (CWSN) AND INCLUSIVE EDUCATION IN CHANDIGARH: STATUS, ISSUES AND ALTERNATIVES

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Abstract: Children with Special Needs (CWSN) in India including Chandigarh have been facing many challenges including access to proper education due to variety of reasons. Inclusive education means the provision of services to the students with special needs in their schools. This means providing the required support services i.e., special curriculum, aids and infrastructure for both students and teachers. There are different terms related to inclusion education, namely Integrated Education, Special Education and Mainstreaming. But it seems that despite initiative of the central government and local administration, inclusive education is a distant reality for Children with Special Needs (CWSN) as coverage of special education is very poor in government as well private schools in Chandigarh and teaching staff is not properly trained. The paper highlights a major shift in recognising the educational needs of CWSN which came with the launch of the comprehensive Integrated Education of the Disabled Children (IEDC) in 1974. The Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016 strives to assure that persons with disabilities enjoy the same respect, integrity, dignity, right to equality as their counterparts. The Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act includes 21 disabilities. At present total number of CWSN enrolled in schools & being covered under Home Based Education in Chandigarh are 4302. The objective of the present paper is to discuss status, issues to inclusive education and mainstreaming i.e., lack of resources, accessibility, and enrolment of CWSN, special schools and trained teachers, inclusion policy, teacher anxiety. Inclusive education can eliminate the forms of discrimination in schools. The paper also discusses how resource teacher support system, early identification of the CWSN and working on various alternatives to meet their education needs including changing policy perspectives in the light of The Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016 and NEP 2020 to promote better education and skills that can lead to inclusiveness in Chandigarh to help the CWSN.

1. INTRODUCTION:

Every person has an inherent right to education under the principle of opportunity equality because education is a fundamental human right. No student shall be denied access to or be subjected to discrimination in education on the basis of race, colour, sex, language, religion, political opinion, or other affiliation; national or social origin; disability; or birth poverty; or any other status (Kalita&Swargiary, 2013). According to the United Nations International Children's Fund (UNICEF) Report (2015), 990,000 children aged 6-14 years (34%) are not attending school in India, out of 2.9 million children with disabilities. Children with intellectual disabilities (48%), speech impairment (36%), and multiple disabilities (59%), have a higher percentage. There are many negative attitudes, cultural myths and superstitious beliefs towards Persons with Disabilities (PWD) in the society.

Internationally, **World Declaration** on "Education for All" in 1990, it gave thrust to Integrated Education in India. **The Salamanca Statement in 1994** was the first to discuss about inclusion, regardless of physical, intellectual, social, emotional and linguistic or other conditions. The statement affirms, "Those with special educational needs must have access to regular school which should accommodate them, within child centred pedagogy, capable of meeting these needs". **United Nation's Convention on Rights of Person with Disabilities (2006 and enforced in 2008)**, it aims to promote, protect and ensure full and equal enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms by all persons with disabilities and to promote respect for their inherent dignity.

Many groups have historically faced horizontal and vertical exclusion in India, and children with disabilities are one of them. The most extreme form of social exclusion occurs when an individual or group of individuals is identified and judged based on their physical appearance and inability to perform certain tasks efficiently.

According to Davis (2010) “to understanding the disabled body, one must return to the concept of the norm, the normal body”. Further, he stressed upon how society constructs the way in which the person with disabilities are the sufferers and they are most oppressed, vulnerable and humiliated in the notion of the norm. He argues that the “problem is not the person with disabilities; the problem is the way that normalcy is constructed to create the “problem” of the disabled person.

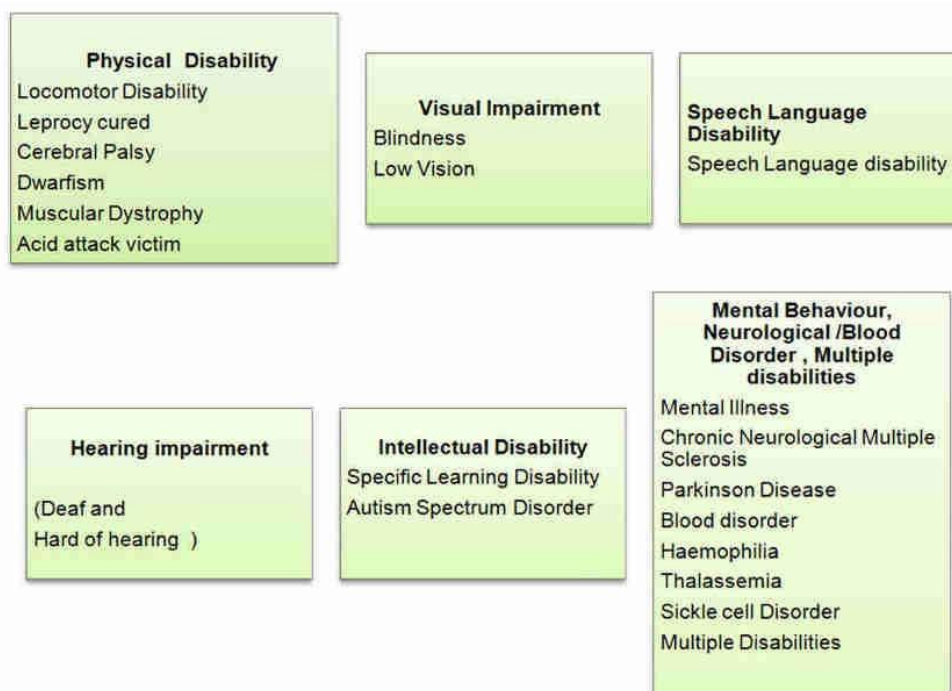
Many studies in the field of special education have come up with the instances of Children with Special Needs (CWSN) being excluded from formal education; some of those, who go to school, dropped out due to lack of the kind of support they needed. These children need to be addressed on both psychological and physical level, which somehow is not induced in regular school system. There are push factors within the school system which gradually leads to their dropout like lack to empathy, aids and curriculum as per their needs. This led to the development of two types of schools i.e., special and regular schools.

Disability studies are still of relatively recent origin (Johnstone,2001). In the context of India, it is in the preliminary stage, a long way to go in it. Historically, organized attempt to educate blind children were made in India when Christian missionaries established schools. The first school for blind children was established by an English missionary known as Annie Sharp in Amritsar in 1887.

The causation of disability is understood based on a number of different variables. These can be seen as an individual’s fate or kismet. The various parameters responsible for disability in an individual form a mutual cause and effect relationship with fate. Besides these, there are many magico-religious beliefs and rituals performed by the villagers to avoid or evade such calamities. These parameters are described by Mehrotra, 2013, p. 126 is given in Annexure I.

Children with Special Needs (CWSN):

CWSN stands for Children with Special Needs. These are children who suffer from some kind of disability and are unable to access the resources of health, education and other social and economic dimensions.



As per WHO (2001) disability is defined as “*disability is any restriction or lack (resulting from an impairment) of ability to perform in a manner or within the range considered normal for a human being.*” In order to provide CWSN with an equal opportunity and respectable status in society, one method that can be suggested is inclusive education. According to RPWD Act, 2016, there are 21 types of disability:

Inclusive Education

The concept of inclusion first gained recognition in Canada followed by the USA and Great Britain. In India the government of India launched the Integrated Education for Disabled Children (IEDC) programme in 1974. In fact, even as early as 1966, the Kothari Commission had highlighted the importance of educating children with disabilities in regular schools. Inclusion in education is based on the belief that every child can learn and realize her full potential if



provided equal opportunities to participate in school, supported with resources required as per their condition and taught in a manner appropriate to her needs. Children studying in an Inclusive school develop confidence and imbibe values of sharing and participation. Thus, **inclusion is a basic human right and not a privilege**. Inclusive Education eliminates all forms of discrimination in the learning environment. Inclusive education gives access to all and promotes best outcomes for all. There are different terms related to inclusion, namely Integrated Education, Special Education and Mainstream.

Concept of Inclusive Education in Chandigarh:

Inclusive educational setup refers to equitable and non-discriminatory arrangement where each child is valued, accepted and respected. Every child gets equal opportunity of participation in all those activities that suits her capability. Schools conduct curricular/co-curricular activities necessary for developmental needs of all students as per their interest. The Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016 in its clause 2(m) defines inclusive education by emphasizing on the condition that all students (except severe cases) should learn together in the same school and teaching there should be appropriately adapted to meet the needs of different types of special students.

The *Samagra Shiksha Scheme* is a comprehensive school education plan that spans pre-kindergarten through class XII. The programme adheres to the Sustainable Development Goal for Education and views academic education as a continuum (SDG-4). The programme supports the 2009 Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act's implementation while also being in line with National Education Policy (NEP) 2020's recommendations. Central Board of school education CBSE has also, made mandatory provisions for schools to accommodate children with special needs by stipulating provisions on disability-specific learning aids, adoption of alternate pedagogies as per the need of the child, and concessions in the scheme of studies and examinations for all categories of disabilities stipulated in the Persons with Disabilities Act 2016.

The *Samagra Shiksha Scheme* in Chandigarh is working hard to accomplish this goal. Unquestionably, a variety of facilities have been made available to children with special needs (CWSN) in order to support their educational needs. 4304 number of CWSN enrolled in schools and being covered under home based education in Chandigarh (UT) are represented in Annexure 2. Early identification of CWSN is extremely important to prevent aggravation of Disability and enable correction. The CWSN identified by resource teachers and medically examined by the medical teams in Chandigarh (UT) Resource teachers and medical team of Govt. Medical College and Hospitals, Sector-32 (GMCH-32) and Govt. Multispecialty Hospital, Sector 16(GMSH-16) under Directorate of Health, UT Chandigarh in order to ascertain the degree and type of disability.

Major Initiatives and its Challenges:

The major activities initiated in Chandigarh for retention and providing quality education for CWSN in Chandigarh are:

- I. Therapy Camps for CWSN at cluster level.
- II. Five days training of teachers inclusive teaching strategies, curriculum adaptations & use of ICT for CWSN.
- III. Support Services in Special Resource Centers.
- IV. Provision of Open Schooling for children with Intellectual Disabilities at secondary level.
- V. Transport & Escort Allowance.
- VI. Stipend to girl CWSN.
- VII. Medical Assessment & provision of aids & appliances.
- VIII. Home Based Education.
- IX. Two days training of teachers on Curriculum adaptation.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW:

Sharma and Sharma (2019) observed that children with special needs in inclusive classrooms often face multiple challenges. These include a lack of appropriate instructional materials, insufficient support services, and difficulties in social adjustment, which hinder their learning and integration.

The Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD) (2017) highlighted critical challenges in the education of CWSN in its guidelines for inclusive education. Key issues identified were inadequate assessment processes for CWSN, a shortage of trained resource teachers, poorly equipped resource rooms, and the presence of architectural barriers, all of which limit accessibility and inclusivity.

Das, Kuyini, and Desai (2012) reported that teachers often rate their ability to support students with disabilities

as inadequate. This lack of confidence and preparedness among educators is a significant barrier to inclusive education.

Chaudhri (2015) emphasized that special educators in schools frequently lack both theoretical knowledge and practical teaching skills required for working with children with learning disabilities. This gap in professional expertise hinders effective teaching strategies in inclusive settings.

Bhatnagar and Das (2014) explored the challenges in implementing inclusive education policies in New Delhi. Their findings revealed systemic barriers such as insufficient policy frameworks, a lack of trained teachers and paraprofessionals, and the fear among educators of failing to meet academic expectations in inclusive classrooms.

Singh (2016) pointed out that nearly 87% of teachers reported having no access to the necessary support resources for managing inclusive classrooms. This lack of resources poses a significant challenge to creating an enabling environment for CWSN.

The World Bank (2007) reported that children with disabilities in India experience significantly lower levels of educational attainment compared to the general population. The illiteracy rate among individuals with disabilities was noted to be 52%, compared to the national average of 35%, indicating stark inequalities in educational opportunities.

According to the MHRD report (2014), while enrollment rates of children with disabilities have increased, a large number remain out of school. Approximately 17 lakh children aged 6–13 with disabilities are not enrolled, with the percentages being especially high for those with intellectual disabilities (36%), speech impairments (35%), and multiple disabilities (44%).

Sokal and Sharma (2017) argued that the success of inclusive education programs is heavily dependent on teachers' attitudes and their expertise in working with children with special needs. Positive attitudes and specialized training are pivotal for effective inclusion.

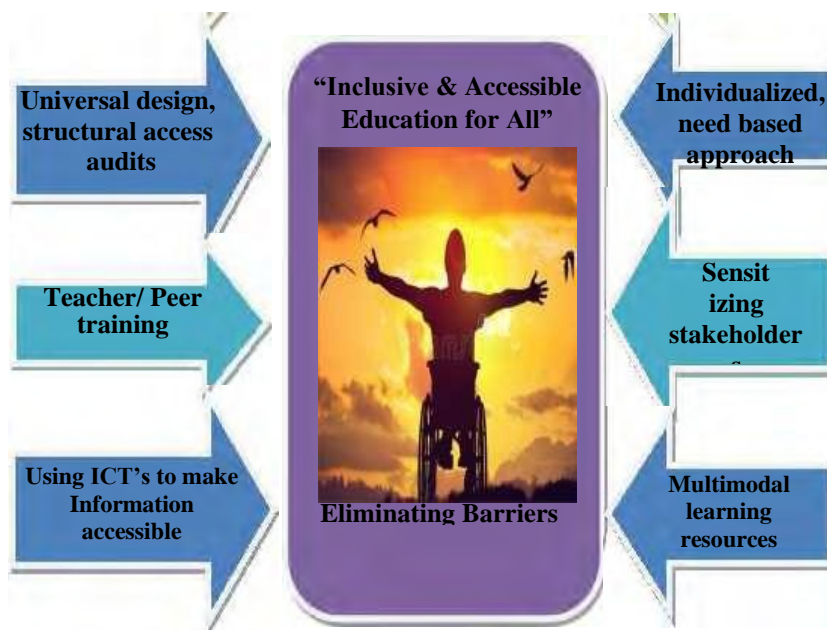
Vaughn and Schumn (1994) identified several factors that negatively influence teachers' attitudes toward inclusion. These include large class sizes, lack of teaching resources, limited parental involvement, insufficient funding, and the absence of teaching aids, all of which contribute to an overwhelming workload for teachers.

3. Challenges in Inclusive Education in Chandigarh:

- **Huge Classroom Strength:** Children with intellectual disabilities should be taught using the reinforcement and shaping adaptive teaching strategies, but the teachers lack practical ability to do so. Despite their best efforts, the teacher claims that it often isn't possible because of the large class sizes. Due to the large class size, it is difficult for a teacher to review every CWSN during a 40-minute lecture.
- **Lack of resources:** Singh, 2016 found that about 87% of the teachers didn't have access to any kind of support resources in their classrooms. The primary support system for the CWSN is provided by resource teachers. With 4304 CWSN students, Chandigarh has 116 Government Schools but only 24 resource teachers are there.
- **Lack of accessibility:** According to a survey study reported by MHRD in Guidelines for Inclusive Education for CWSN (2017), it was found that there are major challenges and issues in education of CWSN which includes assessment of CWSN, lack of resource teachers, lack of well-equipped sufficient resource rooms and removal of architectural barriers. Most parents find it difficult to accept that their child is CWSN. This makes it more challenging for a resource teacher to guide and monitor the student. There are many other barriers to inclusion and accessibility.

Barriers to Inclusion & Accessibility





Source: adopted from TISS Report, Parasuraman & Kolhe, 2015, p.18

- **Lack of enrolment of CWSN:** In a report by MHRD (2014), despite an increase in enrolment number, currently 17 lakh children in the age group of 6–13 with some forms of disabilities is out of school. The percentages are higher among children with intellectual disabilities (36%), speech impairments (35%) and multiple disabilities (44%).
- **Lack of Resource Teachers:** Segregating children with special needs is against the human rights while most of the population lives in rural areas where there are no special schools. There is a need to increase the inclusive education in India and train more teachers to handle the inclusive classrooms (Kumar & Khagendra, 2020). For instance, in Chandigarh, there are 20 clusters that include 116 government schools, but only 24 resource teachers are managing all of those 116 schools' operations. The resource teacher must be on-site at all times at the school, but not during visits because CWSN require special attention in order to feel accepted and part of the community. Consequently, there is insufficient need for any trained individual to be there for them.
- **Teacher Anxiety:** Concerns about how to handle children's challenging behaviour are not adequately addressed. The success of inclusive education in their schools was a subject of debate for many teachers. As a result of having students with special needs in their classes, the teachers expressed their worries about feeling stressed out and anxious.
- **Negative Attitudes:** Research indicates that the successful implementation of inclusive is largely dependent on educators being positive about it (Bhatnagar & Das, 2013; Das et al., 2013). Many teachers are, however, unwilling to include special needs students in their classrooms. In many studies the attitudes of teachers towards educating students with special needs has been put forward as a decisive factor in making schools more inclusive (Hegarty & Alur, 2002).
- **Awareness and Sensitivity among teachers:** Inclusion is the need of the hour but various factors such as massive class strength, vast & rigid curriculum and an inadequate infrastructure, and insufficient training and awareness amongst teachers makes it difficult to make inclusion of CWSN become a reality, (Zaveri, 2001).
- **Lack of certificate courses in India:** There is lack of appropriate certificate courses that train & prepare general teachers for inclusive classrooms. (Mirchandani, 2006).
- **Teacher and Parents Attitude:** A study has demonstrated that the success of inclusion programmes depends mostly on teachers' attitudes towards inclusion and expert knowledge about teaching children with special needs in an inclusive setup. (Sokal and Sharma 2017). When parents do not accept their children as special children, it is very difficult to identify and diagnose a disability in them. Not only their parents but also their peers and their parents do not want their children to take classes with CWSN.
- **Identity:** The teachers must be trained in problem identification, as accurate and prompt problem identification is essential to the mainstream of CWSN.
- **Lack of Parental Support:** When parents do not accept their children as special children, it is very difficult for

resource teacher to identify and diagnose a disability in them. Not only their parents but also peers and their parents do not want their children to take classes with CWSN.

- **Lack of Implementation of Policy:** There are numerous laws and policies for the benefit of CWSN, but they are not implemented effectively. There are fewer resource teachers in some places, and in other places, the supplies needed for teaching aids are not provided adequately, etc. The only resource teachers and the CWSN incharge consistently attend the government-organized training programs, which presents a technical challenge for inclusive education in Chandigarh. Because of this, the other teachers lack adequate training. Counselling techniques, a seminar on the RPWD Act, a regular time frame, and participation from every teacher are all required parts of the training that should be more practical than theoretical in nature.

4. Inclusive Education and Resource Teachers: Key to Main streaming CWSN:

The provision of inclusive education in all schools is the primary focus of this academic paper. Even though the Government of India manages policies and programmes, CWSN is not properly accepted in the majority of schools. While the government, educators, principals, cluster leaders, and resource teachers all work hard, there are still some gaps in the execution of ongoing programmes. In order to integrate CSWN into the mainstream, it is necessary to review these policies and programmes. To support inclusive education for CWSN, there are some programmes and established policies as discussed below:

- i. Sarv Shiksha Abhiyan, 2001-** It was started with the intention of achieving universal access to elementary education. Under the SSA, a zero-rejection policy was implemented to guarantee that every child with special needs (CWSN), regardless of the type, category, or severity of their disability, receives a relevant and high-quality education.
- ii. Right to Education Act 2009-** The Right to Free and Compulsory Education (RTE) Act of 2009 requires all children, including CWSN, to receive free and mandatory elementary education. As this is sponsored by the government, the parents are not required to pay the fee.
- iii. RPWD Act 2016-** The list of disabilities increased from 7 to 21 in the RPWD Act of 2016. There are some key elements of the RPWD Act 2016: Equal access to education, opportunities for sports, and recreation for all students in schools without discrimination. Making the campus, buildings, and other facilities accessible. Making a reasonable adjustment in accordance with the needs of the person. Offering the necessary assistance, whether it be individualized or in another way, in settings that foster academic and social growth in line with the objective of full inclusion.
- iv. New Education Policy 2020-** There are 116 government schools spread across 20 clusters in Chandigarh, but only 24 resource teachers are in charge of running them all. In order for CWSN to feel included and a part of the community, the resource teacher must be present at all times at the school, but not only for visiting. Therefore little need for any trained person to be there for them. According to New Education Policy 2020, a special educator is definitely needed for a particular subject area in the classroom. Such teachers would require not only subject teaching expertise and comprehension of subject-related educational goals, but also the necessary skills to comprehend the special needs of children.

According to Bansal & Kaur (2021), the major challenges felt by the school principals in Chandigarh, UT, were "lack of infrastructure and materials resources, special educators and support services, noncooperation from parents, large class sizes, and behavior problems of children with disabilities." According to the principals in their study, there is still a big need for special educators' services. There were only 18 schools that claimed to have a resource room, but the majority lacked a resource teacher. Most school administrators stated that they require permanent resource teachers to instruct these students. It clearly shows that along with infrastructure and other things "Resource Teachers" are highly important.

5. Resource Teacher: Special educators with advanced training should be chosen to support CWSN with resources, especially when it comes to teaching children with disabilities specialized skills. Because the inclusive education policy applies to all schools, the resource teacher must be posted there. Currently, however, resource teachers are restricted to teaching only in their clusters. This means that all schools under the clusters are in need of full-time resource teachers. If qualified special teachers with the required credentials are not readily available, teachers with short training courses approved by the Rehabilitation Council of India (RCI) may be hired with the requirement that they complete the entire program within three years of employment, or long-term training of regular teachers should be implemented.



6. Discussion and Conclusion

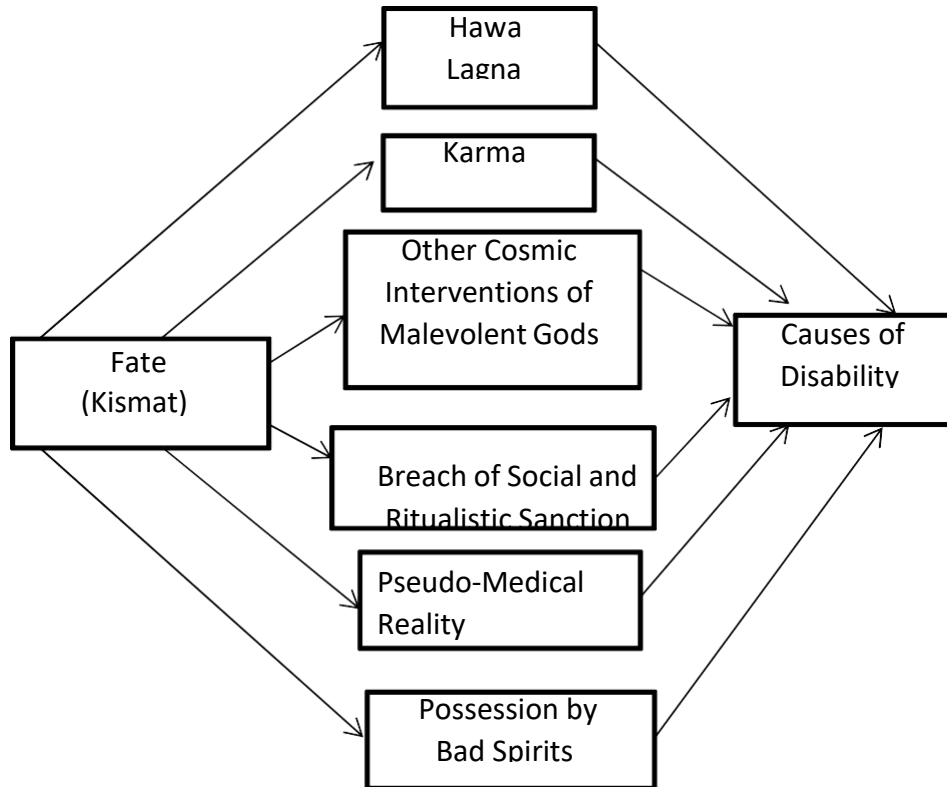
The fundamental premise of inclusive education is that there will be resources and facilities available to support CWSN in general classrooms, such as resource teachers, properly trained teachers, and integrated classrooms. The present paper's findings indicate that schools in Chandigarh are inclusive, but that policies, programs, teacher training, lack of resource teachers, and a high number of students per class face significant obstacles to the effective implementation of those inclusive educational policies. Findings, in particular, show that there was no resource teacher in every school. It is challenging for a teacher to go over every CWSN during a 40-minute lecture because of the large class size. The government is working and funding the resources and trainings, but it has been noticed that only the resource teacher and the CWSN in charge are repeatedly attending the training. Finally, it can be said that working together, increasing public awareness, and sensitising the general public will help to lessen the stigma attached to CWSN. It is necessary to re-evaluate and modernise social stereotypes that inhibit social change. The public needs to be made aware of the issues and challenges the CWSN is facing. Focus should be placed on structural changes that create opportunities for inclusion. Additionally, it is suggested that the policies may be implemented properly at the local level. There should be a resource person to manage and assess the CWSN in every school. Once an inclusive environment is established in the school, the CWSN will flourish and be able to pursue newer opportunities. Consequently, the resource person is a core pillar of inclusive education.

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Annexure -1

The Causal Conceptions of Disability Converging into the All-Pervasive Idea of Fate



Source: Mehrotra, 2013, p. 131

Annexure -2

No. of CWSN in Schools and under Home Based Education				
S.No	Category	Total No. of CWSN covered	No. of CWSN enrolled in schools (U - DISE)	No. of CWSN Covered through HBE
1	Low Vision	1320	1318	2
2	Blindness	158	157	1
3	Hearing Impairment	136	133	3
4	Speech and Language Disability	1102	1100	2
5	Orthopaedic Handicap	270	259	11
6	Cerebral Palsy	104	74	30
7	Intellectual Disabilities	542	448	94
8	Specific Learning Disabilities	476	476	0
9	Multiple Disabilities	158	84	74
10	Autism Spectrum Disorder	12	12	0
11	Chronic Neurological Conditions	1	1	0
12	Dwarfism	11	11	0
13	Haemophilia	1	1	0
14	Leprosy Cured Persons	1	1	0
15	Multiple Sclerosis	2	2	0
16	Muscular Dystrophy	5	5	0
17	Thalassemia	3	3	0
18	Mental illness	2	2	
	Total	4304	4087	217