

Exploring the Practices of Inclusive Education: An Ethnography of Khamtighat High School

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ABSTRACT

Inclusive Education refers to that type of education system where all the students irrespective of their differences are brought together and thereby letting everyone participate in all aspects of the life of the school. The objective of the present study is to study the practices of Inclusive Education carried out in Khamtighat High School. To make an in-depth study the researcher has chosen the ethnography method as it helps to go deeper into the matter. The infrastructure of Khamtighat High School doesn't fulfill the criteria of BFA guidelines provided by Govt. of Assam. Moreover in terms of accessibility to curriculum and teaching-learning also the school is not ready. But in the social context, the school has developed an inclusive nature by welcoming all community people under the roof of the school. Along with all the community, the school has an inclusive environment towards the children from the poor economic background. Although towards irregular and underachievers they do not show any discriminative behavior, but there is a need to take certain steps and techniques towards these students to bring them all together with the other students.

Keywords: inclusive education, ethnography.

INTRODUCTION:

Inclusive Education means to welcome all the students irrespective of their differences and allowing them to participate in all aspects of the life of the school. It welcomes every student from the different social origin, culture or individual characteristics which help them to learn together in the school, whereas special education which was introduced to provide education to the children with special needs in a special situation alienates them from general friendship as well as from the society.

Inclusive Education has got global consideration to remove the exclusion based on social origin, culture or individual characteristics. The movement of Education For all (EFA) was started in the 1990s by UNESCO, UNICEF, World Bank, UN Development Programme and UN Population Fund. After that in again 2000 to re-affirm the goals of the EFA movement the World Education Forum held at Dakar, Sengal. World Conference on Special Needs Education Access and Quality and Education 2030, Incheon declaration held considering CWSN and 48th Session of the International Conference on Education to define an Inclusive Agenda. All these conferences have taken goals to be achieved by all the member nations of the world. They have suggested the concerning agencies to frame policies and planning efficiently to achieve the set goals. Considering this, the Government of India has taken up steps, framed policies and schemes to include all the children of the nation. In this regard policies and schemes like SSA, RMSA, etc are framed. At the state level also, the concerned governments of the states are taking various steps to ensure inclusion as suggested by the Government of India. The Government of Assam has implemented the schemes and policies as suggested by the Government of India which to some extent are being able to provide accessibility to the maximum of students irrespective of their diversity. Mainly the government schools are taken into consideration by the Assam Government for the implementation of the schemes and policies. Moreover, the concept of inclusion should be understood within the context of a school. Therefore the present study is undertaken to explore the practices of Inclusive Education considering the guideline given by concerning government and also from the context of the school in a government school of Assam.

OBJECTIVE

The objective of the present study is

“To study the practices of Inclusive Education carried out in the Khamtighat High School”

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY:

The ethnography method was used to make an in-depth and thick study on practices towards inclusive education. To explore the practices towards inclusive education I considered the school as a living organization where people work or live as a community. In other words, the researcher entered the school's micro world to fulfill the demand of the objective. Data were collected through observation, interviews, document analysis, and fieldwork.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK:

A theoretical framework is important for any research as it helps in research by providing a way to it. In other words, the theoretical framework guides the whole research process. The theoretical frameworks that were chosen for this study were Symbolic Interactionism and Post Modern Theory.

ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION:**A. INADEQUATE INFRASTRUCTURE FOR INCLUSIVE EDUCATION:**

In Khamtighat High School, on the part of children with orthopaedic and visual impairment the classrooms of class VII and VIII and the bathrooms fulfill the guideline of Axom Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan. These parts of the school have ramps with handrails and also there are non-slippery surface in the walkways, however, there are slippery surfaces inside the classes and bathrooms. Both the walkways and surface inside the classroom of class VII are slippery. The path from the gate to classrooms is labeled in one part viz. to Lower Primary classes, class VI, IX and X. But the path from the gate to Class VII, VIII, and K-Yan room is not labeled. During the rainy season all the labeled and non-labeled parts get filled with mud and also the paths become very slippery.

Other than these the school is dangerous for Children with Orthopaedic and Visually Impaired in terms of the path to the hand pumps, thick entrances and doorways, sharp turns, uneven steps, no bright color used in the changes in slope or staircases, slippery and kaccha surface, inadequate lighting to the rooms, a non-hazard environment having broken steps, broken sloppy, broken furniture and also unsafe ceilings.

From the observation following the Barrier Free Access guideline given by Axom Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, the school is not ready in terms of infrastructure. A Child with Orthopaedic and Visually Impairment would face a lot of problems in the school that might alienate him from the other members of the school.

B. INACCESSIBILITY TO CURRICULUM AND TEACHING-LEARNING PROCESS:

Along with the physical infrastructure of the school to be inclusive, there is also a need that the curriculum and teaching-learning process is accessible for the CWSN. The different category of CWSN has a different kind of need. For example, the Children with Moving Difficulties and cerebral palsy need aids and appliances like calipers, wheelchairs, braces, special crutches, wedges, pencil grips, communication board, etc; concrete objects as TLM for Children with Intellectual Difficulties (Children with Mental Retardation); suitable hearing aids and pictorial teaching-learning material for the Children with Hearing Difficulties; Braille, large print, audio, e-text, maps, globes, charts, models, diagrams, Taylor frame, white cane, abacus, low vision aids, magnifiers, etc for Children with Seeing Difficulties And Children with Multiple disabilities need Braille, sign language, e-text, large print, tactile, audio-visual, etc.

In the school, only maps, globes, charts, models, diagrams were there in the TLM corner, although these items are never seen to be used by any teacher during my fieldwork at the school.

Other than these, no teacher with adequate training was there to deal with these children with special needs. So, in the case of materials and resourceful teachers, the school is unable to let children have access to the curriculum and teaching-learning process.

C. AN UNIMPARTED AGENDA:

Though the schemes like SSA at primary level and RMSA at secondary level trying to ensure the education of all the children including the CWSN, the school is not ready to welcome the CWSN on the part of infrastructure and access to the curriculum and teaching-learning process. The Headmistress of the school informed that they follow the guidelines of SSA, RMSA, and RTE. However, they haven't received any document of Persons with Disability Acts.

D. AN INDEFINITE AGENDA:

From interviews of 7 teachers of Khamtighat High School, the researcher got the information that 5 out of 7 haven't even heard the term 'Inclusive Education'. Two of them heard as they had pursued the B.Ed degree where they had a theoretical paper on Inclusive Education. But as the paper is theoretical, a teacher having B.Ed degree doesn't imply having practical knowledge in all its senses of Inclusive Education. To deal with CWSN a teacher has to be a resourceful person with proper training. Other than teachers the office assistant also has not heard the word for the first time from me. So, the concept of inclusive is not clearly understood by the teachers of Khamtighat High School.

E. NON- INCLUSION BASED ON COMMUNITY AS FLEXIBILITY CONCERN:

The students of Khamtighat High School come from Ahom, Sonowal Kosari, Deori, Matak, Mahanta and tea community. To study whether community affects their daily lives of the school an attempt was made to observe students, teachers and also parents, to know the way they practice in the community. They were observed at different times and different contexts of the school hours. In peer selection, both the same community and mixed community groups were found. The same community groups were from the same village and the same lower primary school. The community seemed to be a factor in their selection of peer but rather it is the previous school of primary education.

The peer selection affects all the hours of the schools including the special days. They spend their time with the peer they chose and also interact with other students as well.

On the part of teachers also the community is not a factor of discrimination. From the situations observed during the period of fieldwork, the teachers showed a socially inclusive behavior towards their students as well as their colleagues.

Parents also seemed to be non-discriminative in terms of community. By sending their child to the school where students from the different communities come, parents showed a socially inclusive behavior. Other than these when they visit the school for different purpose no such discrimination was observed.

F. GENDER SECLUSION:

Separation on the basis of gender among the students was observed during the fieldwork at different hours of the school. Starting from prayer till the end of the school students stays with their peer of the same gender – in prayer, they make separate lines for boys and girls, in the class separate seating arrangement for boys and girls, during mealtime have food with the partner of the same gender, on the special days also they sit or stay with a peer from the same gender. Teachers also keep in mind the gender aspect while allotting work to the students. So, on the basis of gender students don't show non-inclusive behavior but they love to stay with the same-gender partner.

On this part, it was observed that menstruation is a very secrete concern among the community. The girl students who have got her puberty are requested to maintain a distance from their brother also.

G. NON- INCLUSIVE SCHOOL MANAGEMENT IN LOCAL CONTEXT:

The school management committees such as SMDC and Satra Sangsad (Student Parliament) were formed by the schools for the smooth running of the school. In the formation of SMDC, the guideline given by the government is followed and fulfilled accordingly. But if it is seen from the local context the committee is not representative as it didn't include any member from the tea community.

In the Satra Sangsad (Student Parliament) also no students from the tea community were included. However, the students themselves nominated and selected members for the student parliament. On the part of gender, the Student Parliament is a representative one.

H. PRIORITIZING WILLINGNESS AND BETTER PERFORMANCE LEVEL IN SCHOOL PROGRAMMES:

In all other school programmes like in morning assembly, wall magazine, Sanibaria Chora, observation days and NCC, students who wish to perform and join in the programme are given the opportunity. In some situations, students are selected based on performance in a particular area. For e.g. in preparation for the magazine boys with good handwriting was selected, another example wherein the Sanibaria Chora and observation days programme Prakash Gogoi is asked to sing a song in the programmes as he is good at singing.

So, basically in these programmes of school, the students who wish to join and who are performers in some field are given an opportunity. The community, gender, academic ability, and socio-economic status are not prioritized in allowing performing in programmes.

I. INCLUSIVE BEHAVIOUR TOWARDS THE STUDENTS WITH SEEING DIFFICULTY BUT NON-INCLUSIVE IN TERMS OF FACILITIES:

There were two children with seeing difficulty in Khamtighat High School. Two of the children were never excluded by the students and teachers as well. One student himself said that nobody has ever said anything to him for his vision. Moreover, his friends never show any problem to let him sit on the first bench. He is a very good singer according to their teacher.

J. PRACTICE TOWARDS TEA COMMUNITY STUDENTS:

There are a total of 22 students out of 242 students. Though in the SMDC and Satra Sangsad there are no members from this community, but in the school premises during my observation teachers didn't show any discrimination towards them. Ex-students of Khamtighat High School Deepanjali Kurmi, who is a tea community student was remembered proudly by their teachers for her achievement in university.

L. PRACTICE TOWARDS POOR STUDENTS WITH RESPECT TO THEIR ECONOMIC BACKGROUND:

Many students of Khamtighat High School are from poor socio-economic backgrounds. The Government of Assam is taking various steps to help the poor students in continuing their education. Free education, free textbooks, free uniforms and Mid Day Meal are some steps taken by the Government. Other than these the school has taken another step by keeping some required academic books for class IX and X students in a self which they use as a library. Moreover, the Headmistress of the school helps the poor students by giving the HSLC examination fee and also told the cooks to provide meals to the poor students of higher classes.

M. PRACTICE TOWARDS IRREGULAR STUDENTS:

The irregularity in schools happens for various reasons such as socio-economic status, illness, bad environment, illiteracy of the parents and guardians, interest towards something else other than studies etc. During my observation period, I have seen three irregular students who due to socio-economic status, illness and for the interest in earning money. The teacher put their effort to make them come regularly to the school. However, no such step is taken by the school in this regard.

N. NON-INCLUSIVE IN TERMS OF INFRASTRUCTURE AND ACCESSIBILITY, INCLUSIVE SOCIALLY.

From the infrastructure and accessibility part, the school is not at all ready to welcome the CWSN. The school doesn't fulfill many criteria including a resourceful teacher to deal with CWSN. So, in terms of infrastructure and accessibility, the school is non-inclusive.

But the school is an inclusive one in case of social context. Since its establishment students of different community viz. Ahom, Sonowal Kachari, Deori, Kaibarta etc are coming to the school. To be a socially inclusive school it doesn't require any facility of infrastructure and accessibility. It happens due to the practice among community people for a period of time. The symbolic interaction theory describes that people act on the basis of the meaning they have for them, the meaning arrives from the interaction from social interaction and that get modified over time. The community people over years staying together in the same area and sharing the same school. Social inclusion in the school is the result of the practice among the community people over the years.

O. WHY DO THEY PRACTICE SOCIALLY INCLUSIVE BEHAVIOR?

There are various reasons behind their socially inclusive behavior in the school. Common market, a commonplace for Pooja celebration and also some community sharing activities are observed during the fieldwork. People of other communities are invited for a celebration of different occasions. During my fieldwork, the teachers also organized a party at a cook's place who belong to the tea community. So these are the practices that are carried out by the people of Jokai and these practices get reflected in the school. So, though the schemes and policies have failed to make the school adequate for CWSN to

be fully inclusive, but due to the practices carried out by the community has to lead the school to become a socially inclusive one.

7.0 CONCLUSION

The infrastructure of Khamtighat High School doesn't fulfill the criteria of BFA guidelines provided by Govt. of Assam. Moreover in terms of accessibility to curriculum and teaching-learning also the school is not ready. The Government has to take the necessary step to make the schools CWSN friendly in all terms. In the social context, the school has developed an inclusive nature by welcoming all community people under the roof of the school. The school also poses an inclusive attitude towards the children from the poor economic background. Although towards irregular and underachievers they do not show any discriminative behavior, to bring them all together with the other students there is a need to take certain necessary steps and techniques. Underachiever students are never blamed for their poor achievement but rather their parents are blamed for the same.

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