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## BARRIER FREE ENVIRONMENT FOR INCLUSIVE EDUCATION OF CHILDREN WITH HEARING IMPAIRMENT AT SECONDARY LEVEL

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### Abstract:

*International and national conventions, legislations and frameworks have endorsed the need for educating all children under one roof. The Article 3 of the Salamanca Framework for Action (1994) documented that schools should accommodate all children regardless of their physical intellectual, emotional, social, linguistic or other conditions. In order to attract and retain all children including children with hearing impairment (CWHI), Indian education system should respond flexibly. The flagship programmes of Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) and Rashtriya Madyamik Shiksha Abhiyan (RMSA) launched by the Ministry of HRD promote inclusive education of all including CWHI in mainstream schools. In order to achieve the goals of SSA and RMSA, the barriers in inclusive education of CWHI need to be identified and fixed. The present paper lists the ways and means of creating a barrier free environment for children with hearing impairment in secondary schools.*

### KEYWORDS-

Rashtriya Madyamik Shiksha Abhiyan, barrier free environment, children with hearing impairment.

### INTRODUCTION-

The education of children with hearing impairment (CWHI) is not new to this country. With more than 128 years of experience in educating CWHI, the policy makers, special educators and other allied professionals have learnt many lessons including availability and suitability of educational programmes offered to these differently abled children. In the last decade, the country had taken a bold step in changing the philosophy of educating children particularly in the age range of 6- 14 years. As a result, inclusive education has emerged in the country as an addition to the existing educational programmes to attract the unreached, disadvantaged and out of school children. The MHRD's flagship programme of Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (2002) was then launched as the tool for enrolment and retention of all including CWHI in mainstream schools at primary level. With the support of SSA, many primary schools have come forward in creating a barrier free environment for the differently abled children. The data published by the MHRD revealed that thousands of CWHI have been enrolled under SSA and their differential instructional needs are met through mobile/resource teachers. Subsequently, Ministry of HRD has launched another flagship programme 'Rashtriya Madyamik Shiksha Abhiyan' (RMSA) in 2009. The vision of Rashtriya Madyamik Shiksha Abhiyan(2009) is to make secondary education available, accessible and affordable to all young

individuals including CWHI in the age group 15-16 years. The objective of the Abhiyan is to provide universal access to secondary education by 2017 and achieve universal retention by 2020. Though this programme is still in its infancy, it will be of great support to all those enrolled in primary special and mainstream schools to continue their secondary education through this programme.

Earlier, the special schools in the country have been considered as one of the pioneering agencies for educating CWHI. Today, more than 600 special schools are functional in the country offering early intervention, preschool and primary and secondary education. However, these special schools have been equipped to cater only a small percentage of the target group. With the introduction of SSA and RMSA programmes, many are fortunate enough either to continue formal education in mainstream schools or to transit from special to mainstream schools for their further education. In this context, the major question emerges is 'How are the secondary schools in the country going to create a barrier free environment for CWHI for secondary education?'

### **BARRIERS IN EDUCATION**

Barriers to inclusive education are many. While looking at the macro level, lack of proper understanding of the concept and philosophy of inclusion; community attitudes; poverty; insufficient government leadership; non-availability and quality of human and material resources; fragmented approaches; lack of advocacy and lack of adequate confidence building programmes for CWHI are all the major threats in promoting inclusive education in the country. On the other hand, communication between the CWHI, teachers and peers, weak foundation at the primary level, language difficulties, poor literacy skills are some of the barriers at the micro level, which can act as roadblocks to inclusive education. Review of literature in this regard revealed that the researchers have grouped the barriers in educating CWHI in mainstream schools as either (i) attitudinal, (ii) infrastructural and (iii) instructional barriers (Mathew, 2006) or (i) academic, (ii) administrative and (iii) personal barriers (Aich, 2011). If any of these macro or micro level barriers are not addressed well in schools, it will surely turn the secondary education less effective and cause several difficulties to CWHI in pursuing secondary education.

### **BARRIER FREE ENVIRONMENT**

Barrier free environment is widely accepted as a basic necessity and there are attempts all over the world to ensure a barrier free environment for all abled and disabled people. The UNCRPD (2006) gives clear cut guidelines in this regard. A barrier-free environment in schools allows free and safe movement, access and function educational services that can be accessed by all, without any obstacles. There is a popular belief that an amplification device and some visual indicators is all that is needed to make a school barrier-free for educating the CWHI in mainstream schools. It must be clearly understood that barrier-free goes far beyond these and has many other necessary aspects. At the micro level, these ranges from attitude, from admission, from infrastructure, from curriculum, from teaching learning to evaluation. On the other hand, addressing the macro level barriers is often beyond the scope of teachers and principals, but they surely can play a lead role in addressing the micro level barriers in educating the CWHI in their schools.

Tips for creating a barrier free environment

The school principals and teachers play a crucial role in creating barrier free environment in schools. Their efforts in understanding the primary and secondary effects of hearing loss in children create a favorable attitude towards their education in mainstream schools. As a part of empowering them and to realize the objectives of RMSA, the ways and means of creating a barrier free environment for CWHI in secondary schools are listed below.

#### **INFRASTRUCTURE**

- (i) Location of secondary classrooms should be in a less noisy environment
- (ii) Noise level indicators should be installed for self monitoring of the classroom's noise level
- (iii) Seating arrangement should be made preferably in the middle rows
- (iv) Buddy system & peer tutoring services should be made available for educational support
- (v) Frequency modulated / Induction loop system should be installed as a part of classroom amplification
- (vi) Visual display boards should be fixed wherever required
- (vii) Special laboratories for holding language enrichment programmes should be set up
- (viii) C-Print technology should be made available in the classrooms for real time visual input
- (ix) Note takers should be appointed for note taking during lectures
- (x) Sign language interpreters should be made available to prevent communication breakdowns between

the teachers and CWHI

- (xi) 'Disability cell' should be created to spread awareness and promote inclusive education
- (xii) Monitoring and grievance cell should be set up
- (xiii) School and after school support groups of parents and professionals should be made available if required

#### **CURRICULUM**

- (i) Curriculum should be disabled friendly
- (ii) Sign language should be introduced as a subject of learning
- (iii) Flexibility in choice of subjects including skill courses should be made
- (iv) Language adapted text books/ self paced learning materials should be developed and distributed
- (v) Weightage to curricular and co curricular activities should balance so that CWHI could equally participate in both
- (vi) Activities promoting CWHI and their culture should be introduced as a part of co curricular activities

#### **TEACHING-LEARNING METHODS AND STRATEGIES**

- (i) Resource/Team teaching/ Co teaching models should be introduced
- (ii) Collaboration with special schools should be strengthened for teaching
- (iii) Encourage sharing of educational resources
- (iv) Option for choosing individualized education programme should be made available
- (v) Use of ICT for teaching-learning should be encouraged
- (vi) Student centred methods of teaching should be followed wherever possible
- (vii) Supplementary visual teaching-learning materials should be developed and used
- (viii) One or two model inclusive classrooms should be identified / established so as to adopt model practices to other classes and schools

#### **EVALUATION**

- (i) Alternate assessment methods like performance assessment, authentic assessment or knowledge based assessment should be introduced
- (ii) Traditional classroom assessment methods and techniques should be adapted where ever required
- (iii) Appropriate weightage should be given to theory and practical
- (iv) Option for visual-manual mode ( sign language ) of submission of projects and assignments should be made available

#### **CONCLUSION:**

Creating a barrier free environment for CWHI in mainstream schools is one of the primary steps in facilitating inclusive education. The early identification, early intervention and technological advancements have enabled the parents and professionals to address majority of the differential needs of CWHI at a very early stage. As an additional service, schools can create barrier free environment to support secondary education of CWHI thereby promoting equal opportunities, protection of rights and full participation of these children in the mainstream community. Each of the tips mentioned above if implemented in its right sense can make the inclusive secondary education available, attainable, manageable and affordable for all CWHI in the country. Let all our actions support the effective implementation of Rashtriya Madyamik Shiksha Abhiyan in the country.

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