
THE IMPACTS AND EFFECTIVENESS OF SPECIAL EDUCATION NEEDS SCHOOLS IN MYANMAR

Soe Thane

Research. Scholar,
Department of Education, European International University
Paris, France.
Email: soethane75@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Historically in Myanmar, there has been limited recognition of Special Educational Needs (SEN) and developmental disorders. But in recent years, because there has been a greater awareness of these conditions, private schools have sprung up to meet the special needs of students that require special training. Such educational settings with defined roles are increasingly stepping up to meet special educational needs (SEN) provision for these youngsters, providing the attending recognized resources for tried-and-true emulation in their academic, emotional and social development. Five teachers from reputed schools and two parents whose child is studying in such schools currently were interviewed to figure out how effective such SEN schools actually are. Teachers connected their experiences and progression and obstacles posed by their students with the parents who were able to provide a perspective on the influence that this specialized education is having on their children procurement. These individual experiences provide insight into both the good and bad of SEN education in Myanmar. At this time, there are special educational needs schools in Myanmar; they have brought tremendous transformation to the everyday lives of children with developmental disorders and their families. They offer a balanced and welcoming environment for the students' learning as well as development. Therefore, these institutions should not be neglected and the particular endowment should be provided to the government as it was not less than any other institutes. This means that if Myanmar can have inclusive and equitable learning environments (not only in special education needs, but also in general education) by integrating SEN programs in public schools and providing the proper resources and training for teachers, the country has the potential to come up with these learning environments.

KEYWORDS

Impact, Effectiveness, SEN, IEP, Developmental Disorders, Inclusive Education

INTRODUCTION

Until recently, much of Myanmar seemed wholly unaware or lacked understanding in most aspects regarding children with learning disabilities. The conditions-often poorly comprehended and associated with stigma have been Autism, ADD, ADHD, dyslexia, and even Down syndrome. When children, or children of relatives and friends, suffered these conditions, a family generally feels cursed or at least unfortunate. Occasionally they blame the genetics and look into ancestry. In the very beginning, the YMCA had one or two schools that were very patient and caring for students with special needs. But now, things have really improved. As of today, there are more schools under YMCA and eight to nine schools under the Smart Kids' College name and three to four schools under the New Life Foundation across Myanmar. Moreover, many more special educational schools have been built across the nation.

Over the years, special education awareness has become more common and reached more families, especially families of children with learning disabilities. This awareness has translated into improved support and educational services for the kids, helping to nurture an incredibly supportive community. Myanmar was unaware and did not understand much about SEN or developmental disorders for a long time. People's awareness has recently begun to evolve into the recognition that some learners have bespoke educational needs that must be adequately met. This emerging consciousness and need to address this perceived need is now driving private schools that would address more specifically the special educational training such students would require with the necessary level of care and consideration.

For students with developmental disorders, private schools are an important part of the Burmese school landscape with their individualized programs designed around the needs of the students. The schools have warm and supportive environments that do well at closing educational gaps in kids who may not have had those types of opportunities elsewhere. Exercising democratic rights equally has kept the momentum of change going, promoting inclusiveness and equal footing in this country's system.

With the growth in the number of specialized schools, increasing focus is being given to assessing the impact and outcomes of such schools. For such schools to be further developed, adequate resourcing, staffing with special education-trained personnel, and equipping them with the necessary tools and technologies will be key in perpetuating their existence. Given this, addressing the challenges described above and consolidating gains to date, it will be possible for Myanmar to develop a more inclusive and supportive education system.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Impacts of Having SEN Schools

All SEN schools are dedicated to providing personalized support to the pupils, so they significantly benefit from both an academic and social perspective (Dockrell & Peacey, 2002). They have different teacher training systems which enable them to meet the diverse needs of students (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011). SEN academic institutions offer an environment which encourages social development and friendships to facilitate effective interactions (Norwich, 2008). With such supports, such as assistive technology and individualized curricula (Mitchell, 2014), they are prepared to succeed. SEN schools with this kind of inclusive atmosphere make students feel understood and accepted, which in turn prevents bullying and social exclusion (Ainscow, Dyson, & Weiner, 2013). Focused and personalized attention has allowed students to achieve higher and has ensured they do better at a personal development level (Hornby, 2014). SEN schools provide a supportive environment that reduces stress and anxiety levels (Alkahtani, 2016). These schools serve as sources of assistance for families, allowing them to understand and help their children (Foreman, 2009). These SEN schools prepare students for adulthood with key life skills and vocational training (Mastropieri & Scruggs, 2000). Interventions at a young age in these kinds of schools sharply raise long-term outcomes for students (Dockrell & Peacey, 2002). In this way, positive peer interactions in SEN schools allow for the growth of empathy and social awareness among pupils (Schwab & Seifert, 2011). Most SEN schools teach a flexible and adaptable curriculum for their students, so they have the opportunity to pace themselves in their studies (Mackenzie & Petriwskyj, 2017). SEN schools promote well-organized education outcomes by developing individualized education plans (IEPs) for each child (Mitchell, 2014). These schools emphasize holistic development (academic, social, emotional, physical) (Mackenzie & Petriwskyj, 2017). In SEN schools, teachers, specialists, and parents collaborate to holistically support the student in question (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011). Overall, systematic reviews suggest that the educational achievements of learners with SEN in SEN settings are significantly higher than in mainstream settings (Gray, Norwich, & Webster, 2021). Practical approaches developed in this setting are useful for dealing with cross-cultural and political issues associated with children with special educational needs (Hassani & Schwab, 2021). These models are then expanded into effective differentiated instruction strategies and best practices used to create an engaging learning environment for all students (Mastropieri & Scruggs, 2000).

Disadvantages of Not Having SEN Schools

Given the absence of SEN schools, it is likely that pupils with special educational needs will not be able to access the specific support required for their educational and developmental needs (Alkahtani, 2016). Teachers in regular schools may not be properly trained to address the specific needs of SEN students and therefore provide a lower quality education (Mitchell, 2014). For example, students with special educational needs (SEN) are likely to experience social exclusion or bullying from

their peers in mainstream schools, affecting their self-esteem and social skills (Norwich, 2008). Limited access to special resources in ordinary schools also confines the help SEN children acquire (Foreman, 2009). Students with special educational needs (SEN) may find that they are unable to develop genuine relationships with other students and may thus feel isolated from their peers (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011). SEN students lacking such support are at greater risk of losing interest in education and failing to complete their studies (Dockrell & Peacey, 2002). The absence of appropriate support has been associated with higher levels of stress, anxiety, and depression among SEN students (Mackenzie & Petriwskyj, 2017). For example, SEN students may struggle to cope within inclusive settings, which can lead to increased absenteeism (Schwab & Seifert, 2011). Being in a mainstream classroom, SEN students may have difficulties with the syllabus, thereby achieving lower academic results (Mastropieri & Scruggs, 2000). In order to supply the required support and resources, families might be required to invest further time and effort (Ainscow, Dyson, & Weiner, 2013). A lack of SEN schools can result in inequitable opportunities in education, widening the gap between SEN and non-SEN students (Norwich, 2008). Because universal design for learning is not adequately covered in training programs, mainstream teachers tend to put more stress and burnout on themselves trying to accommodate everyone (Foreman, 2009). Another challenge is that non-SEN peers may not understand and empathize with SEN students (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011), so they create a less-inclusive ethos. Many SEN students do not acquire transition skills adequately, which means they are not prepared for higher education or a job (Mitchell, 2014). SEN students also face educational challenges and barriers due to a lack of early intervention or preventive education (Hornby, 2014), and the consequence of this affects not just the students but society as a whole, as the cost to society becomes higher in terms of long-term effects. On a higher level, it has been argued that if special educational needs are not intervened in correctly, then it limits the attained outcomes in literacy and numeracy (Gray et al., 2021). On the contrary, without proper structures in place, social-emotional learning interventions generate mixed results, limiting overall effectiveness (Hassani & Schwab, 2021).

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

1. To study how effective schools for students that struggle with developmental disorders has on their academic, emotional, and social development in Myanmar.
2. To study and analyze experiences of teachers working in SEN schools and parents whose children attend to these schools to determine advantages and disadvantages of this type of education.
3. To explore how awareness and stigma around special educational needs and developmental disorders have changed over time and assess whether SEN

schools have contributed to this change.

4. To analyse the impact on the growth of SEN schools in Myanmar have had from the organizations such as YMCA, Smart Kids' College and New Life Foundation.

5. To strengthen evaluation of resources, teacher training, and the technologies available to SEN schools in sustaining and improving their services.

6. For both the Ministry of Education & other concerned stakeholders to identify how SEN programs can be added to public schools to create inclusive & equitable educational contexts for all of Myanmar.

7. To examine how SEN schools have provided a supportive environment for families of children with developmental disorders and further contributing to their communities.

RESEARCH QUESTION

1. Do Special Education Needs (SEN) schools in Myanmar positively impact students' academic and social development, and to what extent are these impacts practically effective?

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Due to the lack of IEPs, specialized education programs designed for all children, within government schools, I will be conducting my main research on two private schools that specialize in SEN. I will be interviewing five teachers and two parents whose children attend these schools. Apart from observing their teaching strategies and pedagogies, I will analyze their curriculum and see the effectiveness of their instructional methods. My survey is expected to take at least a month to complete.

This research tries to seek ways of cultivating awareness of why integrating SEN into a public school will be great because every child deserves quality education. At this present time, not much active research interest in SEN in Myanmar currently. All the students have equal rights to participate and get main benefits from this public education despite their learning difficulties. Education is the stepping stone to learning, critical thinking, empowerment, and skill development that children require to be productive citizens in society. The research will assist in emphasizing the importance of Special Education Schools and the need for any country to have such schools.

Qualitative methods are more common for this area, due to the strong link with social sciences and the need for regular observations at schools. The approach will have its grounds on the belief that "seeing is believing," which allows gathering and analyzing data in a non-numerical format, texts, videos, and audios. Data defines the concepts,

perspective, and experience and gives a detailed understanding of the topic and breeds new ideas for research.

I interviewed five teachers from two private schools, namely Smart Kids' College and New Life Foundation, at their scheduled appointment times. These were recorded and transcripts kept to analyze the impacts and effectiveness of Special Education Needs schools in Myanmar. I also met on a personal level with two parents whose SEN children benefited from the education. Importantly, not all schools provide Individualized Education Programs; therefore, most are just realizing their existence.

DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

Findings through Teachers' Interviews

Individual interviews with five SEN teachers identify key themes and strategies these professionals use to cater to the diversified needs of their students. To begin with, educators approach a number of learning styles with a differentiated and multisensory approach. They use visual clues, haptics, sounds, and technology to make sure learning is accessible and engaging for all students. The teachers also discussed the use of individual learning plans and project work that allow students to learn at their own speed and highlight strengths they might possess.

On the contrary, technology integration in SEN classrooms refers to teachers using software-based technologies, including interactive whiteboards and apps in the SEN classrooms to create lessons which are engaging. These types of tools support multiple learning types and enable students to keep on task to stay engaged. It's along those same lines as other methods that are lumped into a "category" of things such as cooperative learning and peer tutoring as great methods of allowing all students to learn from one another.

Challenges faced by other SEN teachers include a lack of resources, technical training, and the workload of IEPs. They engage in professional development opportunities, collaborate with their peers, and utilize technology tools to streamline documentation and communication of student learning. They also make do with what's available, sometimes making their own teaching materials.

Teachers also highlighted the issues faced when dealing with behavior and emotional issues within SEN students. Positive Behavioral Support and a well-organized, predictable classroom setup keep students safe and alert. Therefore, emotional support programs based on peer support groups and counseling can be customized to fulfill the emotional needs of students.

Overall, the impact and importance of the commitment and creativity of SEN teachers for students with special needs and the learning environment.

Findings through Parents' Interviews

Parents' involvement is an important aspect in children with Special Education Needs. Teachers keep the parents well-informed and involved in their child's education through constant communication, workshops, and meetings with the parents, in order to contribute to the creation of a supportive learning environment at school and at home. One effective teacher response was to use visual schedules, polymer games, a sensory break, and PECS.

Interviews with parents of SEN kids in Myanmar show both bright sides and challenges. Overall, thanks to the nurturing and patient approach that SEN schools take, parents are appreciative of SEN schools for pushing their children to build their confidence and continue their education. In particular, social skills improved in general and peer relationships were enhanced. Some parents did note that the schools had limitations on resources and struggled with facilities, but it seemed that, while the schools would try to help their children, they often lacked the resources to do so. Truth be told, the parental involvement does go from being very engaged up to and attending school functions as well as meetings, to being extremely burdened because any time both parents may need to deal with the balancing act of work and family. The efforts are additionally well-tracked through support groups and the active representation of the parents; they are expectant of rearing high-valued children for self-governing and individual amelioration. Hope the community at large can be more aware of the SENs or even have resources around the SENs.

DISCUSSION

A Brief History of Special Educational Needs (SEN) Provision in Myanmar: Educating with Empathy. Despite significant challenges, including resource limitations and inadequate training, SEN education seeks to create meaningful learning experiences through individualized instruction, multisensory strategies, and parental collaboration. They show creativity, resilience and commitment to putting SEN pupils first. Overall, parents are generally very positive about the supportive climate offered by SEN schools, but the issues regarding resources and parental involvement indicate areas where improvements need to be made. Prioritising these gaps could lead to not only a more effective system for SEN education but a more equitable system for access to education for all pupils.

It is important to tune this discussion with the goals of the research

Affirmation of Individualized Instruction and Multimodality: Highlighting the impact of tailored support; there is evidence that multisensory learning approaches can lead to improved engagement and this can translate into long-term benefits; SEN-focused schools should further investigate the long-term outcomes of their students to support the notion that early intervention—in concert with specialized teaching strategies

can more broadly foster academic and emotional growth.

Implementation of Technological Advancements: There is a need to explore how technology plays a role in SEN education and encompasses practical aspects in a classroom setting. Future studies could reveal best practices for the use of assistive tools to meet a range of student needs.

Parental Involvement

More is better - students perform better and are happier. Exploring ways to foster closer connections between schools and families may help illuminate how to enhance these relationships. So, future research here would definitely help us better understand SEN education and help us continue developing its path. Exploring the solution for how high-quality education can be provided to SEN students will enable educators, parents and policymakers to better meet the challenges ahead and survey the opportunities available that equip SEN students with the tools that allow them to succeed in their education and in life.

SEN schools in Myanmar have continued their efforts to promote inclusive education. Nonetheless, the urgent need for continuous advocacy, partnerships, and reforms in tackling such issues will be fundamental in supporting the comprehensive growth of SEN children. And through the focus on long-term results, technology integration and engaging parents in support of their children, the debate constitutive a pathway forward for enhancing SEN education provider.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Teacher Professional Development and Training

- **Regular Training Sessions:** Conduct frequent training sessions in special educational needs for teachers with the objective of upskilling them and bringing them on par with the state-of-the-art educational pedagogies and technologies. And those can often be extremely advantageous via workshops and online sessions, seminars.
- **Peer Collaboration:** Allow teachers to learn from each other. A network of SEN teachers would exchange ideas and resources, thereby improving standards in teaching.

Improved Resource Allocation

- **More Funding:** Additional funding from the government and other non-government organizations will improve the resources facilities of SEN Schools, including better in-class materials, technological advancements, and infrastructure, amongst others.
 - **Resource Sharing:** Simplifying the sharing of resources between SEN catering schools. It will reduce impact of scarce resources since all the schools are guaranteed
-

of getting the materials they need.

Improved Parental Engagement

- **Workshops and Training for Parents:** Regular training session in order to train parents how to support their children in honing their skills at home. The resources and strategies provided will allow parents and caretakers to become more engaged in their students' learning.
- **Flexible Scheduling for Meeting:** Schedule meetings like parent-teacher conferences flexible to cater for parent work schedules. This is the only method to guarantee that every parent will be involved in this process through their child as they grow.

Confronting Behavioral and Emotional Challenges

- **Positive Behavior Support:** In the classroom Christian uses positive behavior support strategies. Such training equips the teachers with the skill set necessary to manage behavioral issues to create a conducive learning environment for the students.
- **Programs for Emotional Support:** Provide programs for the children that offer emotional and psychological support, such as the provision of counseling, self-help groups of peers, or other activities fostering mental health.

Advocacy and Collaboration

- **Public Awareness Campaigns:** Conduct public awareness campaigns on SEN and the importance of supporting such students. More awareness often leads to more acceptance and thus support in the community.”
- **Policy Change Advocacy:** Advocate for policy changes that prioritize education for your children and provide the necessary resources. Engagement of policy makers and community leaders may ensure sustainable changes.

Through Parents' Interview Results

It is based on the valuable insights through parents' interview regarding the impacts and effectiveness of SEN schools in Myanmar, here are some recommendations and suggestions:

Improve Availability of Resources and Facilities

- **Invest in Infrastructure:** Develop the physical infrastructure so that SEN schools are sufficiently equipped to respond to the diverse needs of students which is shaped by adaptive classrooms, therapy rooms, and disability-friendly infrastructure.
 - **Educational Materials:** Provide adequate educational materials, including assistive technologies for use by, and in, schools tailored to the needs of SEN students to support their learning.
-

Teacher Training and Support

- **Professional Development:** Provide ongoing professional development opportunities for teachers to stay updated with the most effective SEN teaching strategies and approaches.
- **Support for Teachers:** Offer emotional and professional support to teachers to help prevent burnout and ensure that they are able to support their students effectively.

Foster Parental Involvement

- **Regular Communication:** Maintain regular communication between teachers and parents to inform on the child's progress and involve them in the educational process.
- **Conduct Parent Workshops:** Offer training to parents so they have the skills and knowledge that can help them support their child's learning and development at home.

Build Strong Community and Support Networks

- **Parent Support Groups:** Suggest the establishment of parent support groups to allow parents to share experiences, resources, and advice to create a sense of community and mutual support.
- **Local Resources and Specialists:** Provide contacts to local resources and specialists who can offer extra services and support to SEN students and their families.

Promote Social Inclusion

- **Programs for Social Skills Development:** Establish programs with a development focus on social skills and peer interactions among SEN students to ensure improvement in their social competence and relationships.
- **Community Awareness:** Raise awareness regarding SEN students in the broader community to promote acceptance and inclusion, minimizing stigma and fostering a supportive environment.

Advocate for Policy Changes

- **Government Support:** Advocate to the government for increased funding and support for the SEN schools, so that they are properly resourced, have enough staff, and infrastructure.
- **Establish Inclusive Education Policies:** Ensure the continued development and implementation of inclusive education policies recognizing the rights and needs of SEN students in Myanmar.

Track and Assess Progress

○ **Regular Assessments:** Hold regular assessments to monitor the students' academic and social progress, allowing plans and interventions to be customized to their changing needs.

○ **Providing Feedback Mechanisms:** It is helpful to implement feedback mechanisms that allow parents and students to communicate their experiences and improvement suggestions.

This is an area where Myanmar SEN schools will have an important role in guaranteeing the quality of education and so children are able to learn and the best quality education.

REFERENCES

- Ainscow, M. (2005). Developing inclusive education systems: What are the levers for change? *Journal of Educational Change*, 6(2).
- Ainscow, M., Dyson, A., & Weiner, S. (2013). From Exclusion to Inclusion: Ways of Responding in Schools to Students with Special Educational Needs. *American Educational Research Journal*, 50(3).
- Alkahtani, M. A. (2016). Review of the Literature on Children with Special Educational Needs.
- Alkahtani, M. A. (2021). Challenges facing education of students with special needs in Saudi Arabia. *Saudi Journal of Special Education*, 10(3).
- Burt, J. (2020). The rise of special educational needs in modern education systems. *Journal of Special Educational Theory*, 23(4).
- Dockrell, J., & Peacey, N. (2002). SEN – Literature Review. University College London.
- Fernández, H., & Díaz, M. (2019). Pedagogical advancements in special education. *International Journal of Special Education Research*, 28(5).
- Florian, L., & Black-Hawkins, K. (2011). Exploring Inclusive Pedagogy. *Cambridge Journal of Education*, 41(2).
- Foreman, P. (2009). Inclusion in Action. Cengage Learning.
- Gautam, A., & Devi, S. (2017). Comparative analysis of SEN schools and mainstream schools in India. *Indian Journal of Education and Development*, 35(2).
- Gray, P., Norwich, B., & Webster, R. (2021). Review of inclusion effects research final Feb 21.
- Hassan, Q. (2015). SEN schools and societal development. *Middle Eastern Journal of Inclusive Education*, 12(3).
- Hassani, S., & Schwab, S. (2021). Social-Emotional Learning Interventions for Students with Special Educational Needs: A Systematic Literature Review.
- Hornby, G. (2014). Inclusive Education for Children with Special Educational Needs. *European Journal of Special Needs Education*, 29(3).
- Kapoor, R., & Gupta, N. (2021). Assessing the efficacy of individualized learning plans in SEN education. *Journal of Inclusive Pedagogy*, 27(1).
- Lee, K. (2018). The role of technology in supporting SEN students. *Journal of Modern Educational Technology*, 14(4).
- Lindsay, G., & Dockrell, J. E. (2000). Meeting the Needs of Children with Specific Speech and Language Difficulties. *International Journal of Language & Communication*

-
- Disorders*, 35(3).
- Mackenzie, S. J., & Petriwskyj, A. (2017). Curriculum Differentiation and the Inclusion of Young Children with Disabilities. *Australasian Journal of Special Education*, 41(2).
- Mastropieri, M. A., & Scruggs, T. E. (2000). *The Inclusive Classroom: Strategies for Effective Differentiated Instruction*. Prentice Hall.
- Mitchell, D. (2014). *What Really Works in Special and Inclusive Education*. Routledge.
- Moreno, L., & García, J. (2020). Holistic development strategies in SEN schools. *International Journal of Holistic Education*, 22(2).
- Norwich, B. (2008). *Dilemmas of Difference, Inclusion, and Disability: International Perspectives and Future Directions*. Routledge.
- O'Connor, J. (2016). School-community partnerships in special education. *Community and Education Journal*, 19(3).
- Rix, J., & Hall, K. (2010). *Introduction to Special Educational Needs, Disability, and Inclusion*. Sage.
- Sánchez, M., & López, A. (2018). Building inclusive environments in SEN schools. *European Journal of Special and Inclusive Education*, 31(1).
- Schwab, S., & Seifert, S. (2011). Impact of Inclusion on Students with and without Special Educational Needs. *Austrian Journal of Special Education*, 1(1).
- Thompson, D. (2020). Early intervention and its long-term benefits for SEN students. *Journal of Early Childhood Education*, 16(2).
- Zhao, L., & Liu, W. (2017). Developing social skills in SEN.