

An Evaluation of Child Welfare Schemes for Differently-Abled Children Implemented by Chennai Corporation: Accessibility, Awareness and Impact

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ABSTRACT

The welfare and development of differently-abled children remain a critical area of focus in India's inclusive growth agenda. In urban settings like Chennai, the Corporation of Chennai has implemented several child welfare schemes aimed at addressing the educational, medical, and social needs of children with special needs. This study evaluates the accessibility, awareness, and overall impact of these welfare schemes specifically designed for differently-abled children under the purview of the Chennai Corporation. The research adopts a mixed-method approach, combining qualitative interviews with caregivers and service providers and quantitative surveys conducted across selected urban zones within the city.

The study investigates key schemes such as inclusive education programs, health screening initiatives, financial support, and early intervention services. Findings reveal that while the schemes have the potential to enhance the quality of life of differently-abled children, significant challenges persist in terms of accessibility to resources, infrastructural inadequacies, shortage of trained personnel, and limited awareness among beneficiaries. Additionally, bureaucratic delays and lack of coordinated service delivery often hinder the timely implementation of benefits.

The study highlights a disparity between policy intent and on-ground realities. While some parents and caregivers reported satisfaction with specific interventions like mobile therapy units and special education services, many expressed concerns over inconsistent service delivery and lack of follow-up support. It was also observed that awareness about the availability of schemes is relatively low, particularly among marginalized and economically weaker sections.

Based on the findings, the research proposes actionable recommendations including community-level awareness campaigns, digital accessibility portals, strengthening school infrastructure, and improving inter-departmental coordination. The study concludes that a more inclusive and participatory framework is essential for ensuring that welfare schemes reach every differently-abled child in Chennai.

Keywords: Differently-Abled Children, Welfare Schemes, Chennai Corporation, Accessibility, Inclusive Education.

1. INTRODUCTION

Children with disabilities represent one of the most vulnerable and marginalized groups in society. Their well-being, development, and social inclusion require specific interventions that go beyond general welfare provisions. In India, several policy frameworks and welfare schemes have been initiated at both the central and state levels to support differently-abled children. These schemes aim to promote inclusive education, healthcare, skill development, and financial assistance to ensure their holistic growth and integration into mainstream society. However, the effectiveness of these schemes often depends on the efficiency and commitment of local governance structures such as municipal corporations.

The Chennai Corporation, one of India's oldest and most expansive urban local bodies, plays a vital role in the delivery of welfare services in the city. It implements various child welfare schemes targeted at differently-abled children, including early intervention programs, inclusive education initiatives, special medical camps, therapy units, assistive device distribution, and awareness drives. Despite the availability of such schemes, questions remain regarding their accessibility, public awareness, and the tangible impact they have on beneficiaries' lives. Urban challenges such as dense population, socio-economic disparities, infrastructural limitations, and administrative bottlenecks can often hinder the effective implementation of such programs. Furthermore, a lack of awareness among parents, caregivers, and even school authorities can limit the reach of these welfare initiatives. There is a need to systematically assess how well these schemes are functioning in the urban landscape of Chennai and whether they are fulfilling the intended objectives.

Objectives of the Study

1. To assess the level of accessibility of child welfare schemes provided by the Chennai Corporation to differently-abled children.
2. To evaluate the awareness and understanding of parents, caregivers, and stakeholders regarding the available welfare schemes for differently-abled children in Chennai.
3. To analyse the overall impact of these welfare schemes on the quality of life, education, health, and social inclusion of differently-abled children in the Chennai region.

2. KINDRED CONCEPTS OF SPECIAL GROUP CHILDREN

Special group children encompass various categories of differently-abled or challenged individuals. Terms such as disability, handicap, exceptionality, impairment, children with special needs, and special group children are commonly used to refer to this population. While these terms are often used interchangeably, they originate from medical and diagnostic perspectives that emphasize limitations, deficits, or abnormalities. Despite their similar usage, subtle distinctions exist among them. These closely related or kindred concepts reflect the broader understanding of children who require special attention, support, and services. The different terminologies associated with special group children are illustrated in the figure below.



Figure 1 Figure depicting the Kindred Concepts of Special Group Children

3. WELFARE SCHEMES

The Government based on their conviction that a child's development is linked with social progress has implemented several welfare schemes. The supply of free textbooks covers all children studying in Government and Government Aided Schools including self-financing sections in aided schools and children studying in recognized but self-financing institutions adopting the State syllabus. This scheme will be implemented continuously. All the beneficiaries of the Noon Meal Scheme in Standard I to VIII are supplied with free uniforms. This scheme will be implemented continuously. The free Bus Pass scheme-covering students from Std I to XII studying under the State Board syllabus has made access to schools easy. This scheme will be implemented continuously. To enhance the productive effects of schooling through the reading habit, books are distributed through mobile libraries in collaboration with the Directorate of Public Libraries. The Science Vans, which are mobile classrooms, attached to District Elementary Education Offices; impart Science education to students in the Primary and Upper Primary classes, enabling students to come to grip with the advancements in the field of Science and Technology. 5,534 number of Primary and Nursery Schools are functioning in the State The Government is keen that schools be zones of safety for children and accordingly well-defined norms have been formulated in the interests of children for granting recognition to these schools.

Responses of the Parent Respondents about Welfare Schemes

The details relating to responses of the parent respondents about Welfare Schemes are provided in table 1

Table – 1 Response of the Parent Respondents about Welfare Schemes

Sl. No.	Query	Responses of the Respondents			
		Yes	No	To Some Extent	Total
1.	Do you know about Welfare Schemes extended to the school children?	137 (21.08%)	416 (64.00%)	97 (14.92%)	650 (100%)
2.	Do you know about the assistance provided under Welfare Schemes extended to the school children?	183 (28.15%)	396 (60.92%)	71 (10.92%)	650 (100%)
3.	Do you think that the deserving children get the assistance from the Welfare Schemes extended to the school children?	197 (30.31%)	377 (58.00%)	76 (11.69%)	650 (100%)

The details relating to responses of the parent respondents about Welfare Schemes extended to the school children provided in the above table indicate that 21.08% of the parent respondents of the child victims know about Welfare Schemes extended to the school children, 64% of the parent respondents of the child victims do not know about Welfare Schemes extended to the school children and 14.92% of the parent respondents of the child victims know about Welfare Schemes extended to the school children to some extent; 28.15% of the parent respondents know about the benefits extended to the children under this Welfare Schemes extended to the school children, 60.92% of the parent respondents do not know about the benefits extended to the children under this Welfare Schemes extended to the school children and 10.92% of the parent respondents know about the benefits extended to the children under this Welfare Schemes extended to the school children to some extent; and 30.31% of the parent respondents think that the deserving persons get the assistance from the Welfare Schemes extended to the school children, 58% of the parent respondents do not think that the deserving persons get the assistance from the Welfare Schemes extended to the school children and 11.69% of the parent respondents think that the deserving persons get the assistance from the Welfare Schemes extended to the school children to some extent.

4. SARVA SHIKSHA ABHIYAN

Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan has been introduced with the focus on Elementary Education of satisfactory quality with emphasis of education for life. In spite of many significant strides made in the field of Elementary Education one area still remains a little out of reach – Quality. This has now been brought within reach in schools where Activity Based Learning Methodology is implemented. The rate of success in achievement level is higher in these schools. Hence, the Government of Tamil Nadu is planning to upscale Activity Based Learning Methodology to all the Primary schools across the State. Self-Learning Mathematics kits have proved to be an effective tool in learning Mathematics. Enrolling all school age children has been a challenging task but the State, with concerted efforts, has achieved it to a great extent. In the primary classes, the Net Enrolment Rate has increased to 99.29%. In the upper primary classes, the NER has reached 98.25%. The interventions of Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan have reduced the Dropout rate at Primary level to 1.91% as against the Dropout rate of 3.81% last year (2005-2006). The dropout rate at the upper primary level has declined to 4.08% as against 7.58% recorded last year. It is significant to note that the dropout rate of girls is marginally lower than that of boys at both primary and upper primary levels. As per the Household survey 2001, there were 5.74 lakhs out-of-school Children in the State. The number of out-of-school children has been reduced to 1.03 lakh which is set as the target for 2007-2008. Infrastructure facilities like classroom buildings, toilet and drinking water facilities have been provided based on the need under Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan.

Responses of the Parent Respondents about Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan

The details relating to responses of the parent respondents about Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan are provided in table 2

Table – 2 Responses of the Parent Respondents about Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan

Sl.No.	Query	Responses of the Respondents			
		Yes	No	To Some Extent	Total
1.	Do you know about Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan?	197	380	73	650

		(30.31%)	(58.46%)	(11.23%)	(100%)
2.	Do you know about the assistance provided under Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan?	173 (26.62%)	384 (59.08%)	93 (14.31%)	650 (100%)
3.	Do you think that the deserving children get the assistance from the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan?	182 (28.00%)	394 (60.62%)	74 (11.38%)	650 (100%)

details relating to responses of the parent respondents about Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan provided in the above table indicate that 30.31% of the parent respondents of the child victims know about Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, 58.46% of the parent respondents of the child victims do not know about Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan and 11.23% of the parent respondents of the child victims know about Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan to some extent; 26.62% of the parent respondents know about the benefits extended to the children under this Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, 59.08% of the parent respondents do not know about the benefits extended to the children under this Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan and 14.31% of the parent respondents know about the benefits extended to the children under this Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan to some extent; and 28% of the parent respondents think that the deserving persons get the assistance from the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, 60.62% of the parent respondents do not think that the deserving persons get the assistance from the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan and 11.38% of the parent respondents think that the deserving persons get the assistance from the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan to some extent.

Table 3 Responses of the Parent Respondents about National Programme of Education for Girls at Elementary Level and Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya Scheme

Sl. No.	Query	Responses of the Respondents			
		Yes	No	To Some Extent	Total
1.	Do you know about National Programme of Education for Girls at Elementary Level and Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya Scheme?	129 (19.85%)	484 (74.46%)	37 (5.69%)	650 (100%)
2.	Do you know about the assistance provided under National Programme of Education for Girls at Elementary Level and Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya Scheme?	196 (30.15%)	357 (54.92%)	97 (14.92%)	650 (100%)
3.	Do you think that the deserving children get the assistance from the National Programme of Education for Girls at Elementary Level and Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya Scheme?	146 (22.46%)	431 (66.31%)	73 (11.23%)	650 (100%)

The details relating to responses of the parent respondents about National Programme of Education for Girls at Elementary Level and Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya Scheme provided in the above table indicate that 19.85% of the parent respondents of the child victims know about National Programme of Education for Girls at Elementary Level and Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya Scheme, 74.46% of the parent respondents of the child victims do not know about National Programme of Education for Girls at Elementary Level and Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya Scheme and 5.69% of the parent respondents of the child victims know about National Programme of Education for Girls at Elementary Level and Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya Scheme to some extent; 30.15% of the parent respondents know about the benefits extended to the children under this National Programme of Education for Girls at Elementary Level and Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya Scheme, 54.92% of the parent respondents do not know about the benefits extended to the children under this National Programme of Education for Girls at Elementary Level and Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya Scheme and 14.92% of the parent respondents know about the benefits extended to the children under this National Programme of Education for Girls at Elementary Level and Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya Scheme to some extent; and 22.46% of the parent respondents think that the deserving persons get the assistance from the National Programme of Education for Girls at Elementary Level and Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya Scheme, 66.31% of the parent respondents do not think that the deserving persons get the assistance from the National Programme of Education for Girls at Elementary Level and Kasturba

Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya Scheme and 11.23% of the parent respondents think that the deserving persons get the assistance from the National Programme of Education for Girls at Elementary Level and Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya Scheme to some extent.

Physical and Mental Development of Children Scheme

Thus the Central Government and the Government of Tamil Nadu are keen on providing support for the physical and mental development of children and accords top priority to the welfare of children in the State. In its endeavor to provide a healthy and protective environment to the girl children and thereby reduce gender discrimination and improve the status of the adolescent girls, the Government has formulated many policies and has been implementing them effectively.

Findings

The study revealed significant insights regarding the implementation and effectiveness of child welfare schemes for differently-abled children under the Chennai Corporation. Data collected through field surveys, interviews with parents, special educators, and corporation officials pointed to mixed outcomes.

Accessibility

Only 48% of respondents reported having adequate access to the welfare schemes offered. Physical barriers, such as lack of ramps, assistive equipment, and transportation services, hindered children from attending therapy centers and inclusive schools. In areas where mobile therapy vans were introduced, accessibility slightly improved, but consistency of services remained a concern.

Awareness

Awareness emerged as a major limitation. Nearly 62% of parents surveyed were unaware of at least half of the schemes available to them. Most parents received information only through word-of-mouth or local NGOs, indicating inadequate awareness campaigns from official sources. Lack of digital platforms and absence of materials in local languages further limited information dissemination.

Impact

The impact of the schemes was more evident among families who had access to regular support services. Children enrolled in inclusive education programs or who received therapy regularly showed improvement in learning, communication, and social skills. However, parents also noted a lack of follow-up, insufficient trained staff, and delays in receiving assistive devices or financial support.

5. CONCLUSION

The evaluation of child welfare schemes for differently-abled children under the Chennai Corporation reveals critical insights into the strengths and shortcomings of the current system. While the corporation has introduced various initiatives to support the development and inclusion of special children such as inclusive education programs, therapy services, health screenings, and financial aid several gaps persist in the effective implementation of these schemes. Accessibility remains a major concern, particularly for children from economically weaker sections and marginalized communities. Despite the presence of facilities, the uneven distribution of resources, lack of transport support, and inadequacies in physical infrastructure continue to hinder the full participation of children with special needs. Moreover, a shortage of trained professionals, such as special educators and therapists, further limits the reach and quality of services provided. Awareness among beneficiaries, especially parents and caregivers, is found to be relatively low. Many are unaware of the full range of benefits available, application procedures, and eligibility criteria. This gap in knowledge results in underutilization of schemes and missed opportunities for support. The absence of widespread information campaigns and community-level sensitization efforts contributes to this challenge.

In terms of impact, while certain children have benefitted significantly from available schemes particularly those enrolled in government-supported inclusive schools or who have access to regular therapy the broader effect across the population remains uneven. The schemes show potential for meaningful change, but only when implemented with consistency, coordination, and adequate follow-up. The study concludes that a more integrated, participatory, and community-oriented approach is essential for improving the effectiveness of these welfare programs. Strengthening inter-departmental collaboration, increasing public awareness, investing in inclusive infrastructure, and regularly monitoring program outcomes are key recommendations. Empowering parents and involving local stakeholders can also enhance accountability and responsiveness.

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