

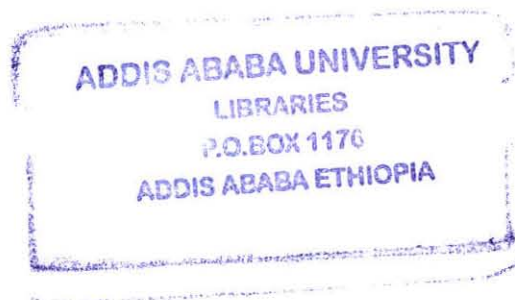
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*A Thesis on*  
*Practices and Challenges of Implementing School Improvement Program*  
*in Relation to Special Needs Education: The Case of Primary Schools in*  
*Gondar Town*



By

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**June 2010**

**Addis Ababa**

*Practices and Challenges in Implementing School Improvement*

*Program in Relation to Special Needs Education:*

*The Case of Primary Schools in Gondar Town*

**A Thesis Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies of Addis Ababa University in a Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Education in Special Needs Education**

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## **Acronyms**

CWDs Children with Disabilities

EIC Education improvement Commission

FGD Focus Group Discussion

McREL Mid-Continent Research for Education

MOE Ministry of Education

SIC School Improvement Committee

SIP School Improvement Program

SNE Special Needs Education

SWDs Students with Disabilities

TGE Transitional Government of Ethiopia

UNESCO United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

## Abstract

*The main objective of this study was to investigate the practices and challenges of primary schools in implementing school improvement program (SIP) to address the needs of students with special needs. The study was conducted in 5 government primary schools in Gondar town where students with special needs were placed. Respondents for this study consisted of two educational officers, five school principals, thirty school improvement committee members, fifty seven teachers and fifty one students with special needs. Such data gathering instruments as questionnaires (both open-ended and close ended), interviews, focus group discussions (FGD) and document review were employed to gather the required data. The questionnaires were used to gather data from the teachers, school improvement committee (SIC) members and the students. Interviews were conducted with educational officers and the principals. FGD also conducted with 6 selected teachers. The major finding of the study indicated that the schools' community has increased awareness of the special needs of the students. The school's leadership and management bodies were found to be supportive to the education of children with special needs. The study also revealed that there is increased collaboration and cooperation between special needs education and regular education teachers. On the other side, the findings of the study indicated that the teaching learning process has not been carried out in line with the special needs of students. The schools' physical environment was not easily accessible to children with difficulty in mobility. In addition, the schools' effort to involve student with disabilities, their parents and special needs education teacher in school decision making is low. The support of woreda education office and zonal education department to the education of children with special needs was also found to be limited. The study indicated that lack of skilled man power (special needs education teachers) and financial and material resources were the most severally affecting factors of the implementation of the SIP in relation to special need education. Based on these findings, the researcher would like to conclude that the status of primary schools in the research area in implementing the SIP in relation to special needs education is low.*

# Chapter One

## Introduction

### 1.1 Background of the Study

International and national policy documents, declarations, conventions, and framework for actions regarding education have confirmed that education is becoming more and more a necessity and an intrinsic right of citizens. For instance, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, (1948) states that every one has the right of equal access to education. It establishes the principle of free basic compulsory education for citizens. Similarly, the World Declaration on Education for All, EFA (1990) also declares the inherent right of a child to a full cycle of primary education. It reconfirms equal access to appropriate quality education for all including children with special educational needs.

Ethiopia, in line with these and other relevant international policy documents, has formulated and established national legal and policy documents in realization of its citizens the inherent right to appropriate and quality education. This obviously should include children with special educational needs. The Constitution and the Education and Training Policy are among the major documents that declares the right to education. The Ethiopian Constitution (FDRE, 1995), article 41 and 90 establishes universal right to education. In line with the constitution, the Education and Training Policy also requires universalizing primary education (TGE, 1994).

Since the formulation of the New Education and Training Policy (1994), the Ethiopian government has made efforts to achieve the goal of Education for All. And as the result, the government has improved accessibility of education, especially in primary education. According to the Ministry of Education report (MOE, 2009), the general enrollment rate at primary level (1–8) has increased from 68.4% (9,542, 638) in 2003/04 to 95.6% (15,340, 786) in 2007/08. Among the 15,340, 786 primary school students in the year 2007/08, the number of children with special educational needs who have access to primary education reached 35,177 which account about 0.23% of the total population of the primary school students in the year 2007/08.

The MOE (2009) report indicates that the government's effort has resulted in encouraging achievements especially in access to education. However, challenges still remain to materialize the general education and training policy of the government that emphasize the provision of greater access

to primary education with enhanced equity, quality, and relevance. Despite the improvements achieved in the general enrollment rate (GER) at primary education levels, the report (MOE, 2009) indicated that there is still a gap in providing relevant and quality education for all and implementing special needs education through addressing the needs and respecting the rights of children with special educational needs to education.

Although reliable data on the school aged children with special educational needs at national level is difficult to find due to lack of well organized nation wide report, using the international average, it is estimated that Ethiopia has between 1.7 and 3.4 million school aged children who require special needs education (MOE, 2006). But as indicated in the previous discussion, among this large population, only insignificant number (35, 177) (MOE, 2009) which accounts about 1% to 2% of the total population of school aged children with special educational needs has access to primary education in the country.

Despite their enrollment rates, low achievement, repetition, and dropout have continued to be serious problem in the education system in the country (MOE, 2006). For instance, the total repetition and dropout rate at primary education level (1 – 8) which was reported in the year 2006/07 was 6.2% and 12.4% respectively (MOE, 2009). Though reliable data regarding the repetition and dropout rate of children with special educational needs has not been mentioned yet, due to lack of identification, assessment and support, children/students with learning difficulties or disabilities are more likely to repeat and dropout (Tirussew, 2001, 2006 cited in MOE, 2006).

Issues so far discussed suggest that Ethiopia, in spite of some encouraging outcomes, needs to do more before education for all and the improvement of quality of education is fully realized. In this regard, extra efforts to increase enrollment rate, to improve quality of education and enhance the students' achievement are needed. In order to alleviate the problems and consequently move further in assuring provision of appropriate and quality education for all citizens including children with special educational needs, Ethiopia has taken new educational initiatives since the past few years.

Special Needs Education Program Strategy (MOE, 2006), General Education Quality Improvement Package (GEQIP), (MOE, 2007a), and School Improvement Program (SIP), (MOE, 2007b), are

among the major educational initiatives that the country has launched to improve the access, equity and quality of education.

The special needs education strategy which was developed in 2006 is mainly aimed at ensuring access and quality education for marginalized children and students with special educational needs (MOE, 2006). The strategy gives emphasis to inclusive education to meet the Universal Primary Education Completion (UPEC) and Education for All (EFA) goals. It is the first program in its kind in the country to provide a more clear nation wide strategy on the delivery of special needs education so that the program could provide better opportunity for children with special educational needs to get more quality education.

The General Education Quality Improvement Package, (GEQIP), is the second general educational program which was formulated in 2006 and has been implemented since then so as to improve the quality of education and enhance students' achievement. The package comprised of six pillars: School Improvement Program (SIP), Information and Communication Technology (ICT) expansion program, Civic and Ethical education, Teacher Development Program (TDP), Curriculum Improvement, and General Education Management and Leadership Program. As the title indicates, the GEQIP is primarily aimed at improving the quality of general education and enhance the students' achievement (MOE, 2007a).

As mentioned earlier, the school improvement program (SIP), which is the focus of this study, was developed as one of the six pillars in the general education quality improvement package. The SIP was introduced in some parts of Ethiopia in 2006 as a pilot program. Then by incorporating the best practices which were obtained from the pilot program, the program (SIP) was promulgated at the national level in 2007 and has been implemented throughout the country since then (MOE, 2007b). The SIP was developed based on the assumption that schools are the main bases for realizing more accessible quality education for all so that improving the overall practices and functions of schools should be the first priority to achieve educational goals more effectively (MOE, 2007b). Schools are the formal agencies of education where the future citizens are shaped and developed through the process of teaching learning. They are agencies that help all students to develop their potentials to the fullest possible level (Aggarwal, 1985, Dodd & Konzal, 2002). There fore, indeed schools must

improve their basic functions, teaching and learning processes, aiming at helping and empowering all students to raise their broad outcomes through school improvement program.

As mentioned in the school improvement framework (MOE, 2007b), the SIP is aimed at maximizing students' achievement and learning outcomes through improving the teaching – learning process and any educational inputs that may have potential effects on the teaching learning process. To this end, schools should conduct self-evaluation to identify their strength and limitations, set priorities, formulate objectives, develop strategic plan (a three years plan) and implement the plan accordingly. Throughout the SIP process all stakeholders like teachers, parents, community, and students are expected to be involved.

In emphasizing the needs of children with special educational needs, the framework of the SIP (MOE, 2007b) states that the implementation of the SIP should be as per the recommendations and decisions indicated in the strategies of special needs education (the strategy which was mentioned earlier). More specifically, as mentioned in the framework, the school improvement process requires assessing diverse needs of children with special educational needs and providing appropriate educational interventions and supports to meet their needs. The strategy also requires provision of special materials and facilities to children with disabilities. Adjusting and modifying the school's environment, curriculum materials, and instructional approaches in line with the special needs of students are also needed in the process of school improvement (MOE, 2007b: 6 – 13). In short, the school improvement program encompasses a wide range of issues of special needs education.

The SIP is a nation wide policy that gives better opportunity for students/ children with special educational needs in that their needs could be more likely to be considered and addressed at school level in general and at classroom level in particular through school improvement efforts. This implies that a school in the country, through efforts regarding the school improvement processes, is expected to help all students, especially children/students with special educational needs to develop their potentials to the fullest possible levels.

However, the journey of schools towards achieving the intended goals of SIP may not be as smooth as such as schools are likely to be found bounded by various constraints and challenges to do so.

Regarding the possibility of facing challenges in the school improvement process, Poster and Day (1998) mentioned that it is easy to demand school improvement, but difficult to achieve it as the school itself is a complicated social entity. The challenge is, perhaps, high especially to implement the SIP in relation to special needs education as the majority of school reform initiatives are focused on the general education to the exclusion of special needs education in spite of the frequent reference to improving outcomes for all students (Duchnowski, Kutash, and Oliveira, 2004).

Thus, the researcher felt that assessing the implementation of the SIP in relation to meeting the special needs of students and producing workable recommendations as early as possible is helpful for practitioners of the program to make appropriate decisions and take necessary actions for effective implementation of the program in the future. It is the reason that triggered the researcher to conduct this research.

## **1.2 Statement of the problem**

Nowadays, quality education has been found to be the challenge of many countries. And it has been a topical issue in the world, especially in developing countries. So that many countries have been undertaking different educational initiatives that they thought are important to assure the quality of education for all citizens.

School improvement program is one of the major educational initiatives that many countries have developed and implemented to realize the provision of quality education /Plan International, 2004/.

Ethiopia, like other countries of the world, has launched a school improvement program in 2007 and has been found implementing the program since then. Accordingly, the program is also under way in primary schools of Gondar town (the focus area of this study).

The SIP of Ethiopia was developed in concurrence with the objectives of the country's education and training policy (1994) and that of the special needs education program strategy (MOE, 2006). It has given emphasis to provision of equal opportunity of education for all (MOE, 2007b).

The program has incorporated many of the strategies of the special needs education program. In line with this, the SIP framework (MOE, 2007b) states that:

*...A school should have a comprehensive special needs education policy which is regularly evaluated and follows the recommendations in the special needs education program strategy. ... It should commit it self to promoting equality of opportunities and inclusion.*

The above statements obviously suggest that school improvement efforts should consider and meet the needs of students with special needs.

Formulating promising educational programs, however, is not an end by itself in the course of achieving educational goals. But it is through effective implementation of the program that the intended goals and objectives of the program could be achieved.

The effectiveness of the implementation of the program should be evaluated timely; valuable suggestions should be forwarded; and the required measures should be taken accordingly. It is based on this logic that the researcher has conducted a research to assess the practices and challenges of primary schools in implementing school improvement program in relation to special needs education.

### **1.3 Objective of the Study**

The main objective of this study was to investigate the current practice and challenges of primary schools of Gondar Town in implementing SIP in relation to special needs education. Hence, in order to guide the research process towards the intended objectives, the researcher has formulated the following leading questions:

1. Has the SIP been planned and implemented as intended in the framework in relation to special needs education?
2. What activities were undertaken in the process of implementing the school improvement program regarding addressing the special educational needs of students?
3. What challenges have schools encountered in the course of implementing the SIP in relation to meeting the special educational needs of students?

## 1.4 Definitions of Key Terms

So as to avoid ambiguities, the following key terms are defined in such a way that they depict the concept (meaning) used in this study as follows.

- **Special Needs Education:** It is an education system which mainly focuses on the education of children and students with special educational needs including gifted and talented children and those with motor, sensory, and intellectual impairments, socio-emotional and other problems that hinder students' learning. It involves identifying and removing/reducing barriers that hinder learning, and provide the appropriate support to facilitate the students' learning (MOE 2007b).
- **School Improvement Committee:** The officially organized committee which consists of the school principal, and representatives of department heads, teachers, parents, students, non-academic staff members and the community. It is formulated to plan, monitor and evaluate school improvement program implementation in a school (MOE, School Improvement Frame Work, 2007b).

## 1.5 Organization of the Study

This study is organized in to six chapters. The first chapter is the introduction part and mainly deals with the background of the study, statement of the problem, the objectives and organization of the study, and operational definitions of key terms. The second chapter is about review of related literatures in relation to major issues of this study. Basically, it deals with the basic concepts of school improvement program (SIP), special needs education (SNE), and the link between SIP and SNE. Chapter three also deals with the research design and methodology which was employed in this study. It reveals data gathering instruments and procedures that were used in the study. The fourth chapter focuses on data presentation, analysis and interpretation made in this thesis work. The fifth chapter has presented the discussion of the study. The last chapter (chapter six) deals with the summary, conclusion and recommendation of the study.

# **Chapter Two**

## **Review of Related Literature**

### **2.1 Concepts and Domains of School Improvement**

#### **2.1.1 Basic Concept of School Improvement**

This chapter of the study discusses the main issues that have been addressed in the study based on the reviewed literature. In this section, literatures regarding the concept and domains of school improvement, the experience of school improvement in other countries and in Ethiopia, characteristics of effective schools, challenges in school improvement, the concepts of special needs education and its implication for Ethiopia, and the link between school improvement program and special needs education have been reviewed so as to establish the framework of the study.

##### **2.1.1.1 School Improvement**

Schools are institutions that can prepare children to contribute to the betterment of the society in which they operate, by equipping them with knowledge, attitude and skills important to the society. They are essentially places where all students to learn. Schools, therefore, are charged with responsibilities for delivering more effectively the most important educational services, teaching and learning (Dimmock, 2000). They are expected to cater to the needs of all students through policies of inclusion at a time. To assume their responsibility more successfully, schools should improve their overall practices. The process of making schools effective is the core of what is called school improvement.

School improvement is making schools better places for learning which relies on changes at both school level and within classrooms, which in turn dependent on school being committed to fulfilling the expectation of children and their parents. It is a systematic approach that improves the quality of schools (Plan International, 2004).

As quoted by Hopkins (1989), van Velzon and colleagues has defined the term school improvement as: A systematic, sustained effort aimed at change in learning conditions and other related conditions in one or more schools with the ultimate aim of accomplishing education goals more effectively. The

definition conveys that school improvement efforts are deliberate and involve changing factors that can contribute for better educational provision.

Hopkins, Ainscow, and West (1994) also stated that school improvement is a distinct approach to educational change that enhances students' outcomes as well as strengthening the school's capacity for managing change. It is a strategy and instrument for raising students' achievement through focusing on the teaching - learning process and the conditions which support it. School improvement is also a continuous process schools use to ensure that all students are achieving at high level (WASA, 2005).

Improving school is one which secures year-on-year improvements in the outcomes of successive cohorts of "similar" pupils (Gray et.al, 1999) cited in Gray (2001). It is also a school where instructional strategies and techniques accommodate different rates, styles and abilities, and where decisions about management of all the school's resources are guided by the requirements of the teaching learning process (Carloson, 1996). The process of school improvement involves improving the way the school organizes, promotes, and supports learning. It includes changing aims, expectations, organizations, ways of learning, methods of teaching, and organizational culture (Mortimore, 2000) cited in Gray (2001: 10).

According to Education Improvement Commission (EIC), (2000), a school improvement plan is a road map that sets out the changes a school needs to make to improve the level of student achievement and show how and when these changes will be made. The ultimate objectives of the process is to improve student achievement levels by enhancing the way curriculum is delivered, by creating a positive environment for learning and by increasing the degree to which parents are involved in their children's learning.

In general, as it was mentioned above, school improvement is a combination of planned, continual, and coordinated efforts made both within and out of classroom and school levels to change factors that are related to students learning with the ultimate goal of maximizing the level of all learners' achievement and school's capacity to manage change.

### **2.1.1.2 The Need for School Improvement**

School improvement is an important aspect of the school system. It contributes a lot to the efficiency and quality of the educational provision. As discussed in MOE (2007b) and ACT Government (2004) school improvement helps to create a learning environment that welcomes all learners. It enables teachers to be responsive to the diverse learning needs of students in their teaching learning approaches. Furthermore, school improvement is essential to enhance the involvement of parents and the community in the school's activities and to improve the effectiveness of the school's management. In short, school improvement helps to realize the provision of quality education for all children by making the overall practices and functions of schools more responsive to the diverse students' needs.

### **2.1.1.3 Principles of School Improvement**

School improvement process is a systematic approach that follows its own principles. Lunenburg and Ornstein (1991: 294-5) have listed the following guiding principles that need to be followed in school improvement process:

- Schools should employ a set of goals and missions which are easy to understand;
- Students' achievement must be continuously checked and evaluated;
- Schools need to help all students especially the low achievers need to be tutored and enrichment programs should be opened for high talented students;
- Principals and staff should be actively involved in continuous capacity building to update their knowledge, information and to develop positive thinking;
- Every teacher needs to contribute to successful implementation of school improvement program;
- Teachers must involve actively in staff development by planning and implementing it;
- School environment has to be safe and healthy;
- School-community relationships should be strengthened so that community and parents need to involve in school improvement program implementation; and
- School leadership should be shared among staff, students and parents.

### **2.1.2 Domains of school improvement**

The main objective of school improvement is maximizing the learning outcomes of all learners. To achieve its objectives the process of school improvement needs to focus on specific priorities of

concern among school improvement domains. School improvement domains are the major areas that schools need to consider for improvement (EIC, 2000).

Different countries may have different areas of concern for school improvement. For instance the Education Improvement Commission (EIC, 2000) suggests three major areas for school improvement. It suggests curriculum delivery, school environment and parent involvement as the main domains that need to be considered in planning school improvement. Hopkins (1980) also noted that school improvement has to be linked to staff development, organizational development and planning strategies within the schools as well as demands for accountability, curriculum reform and bureaucratic regulations from the outside.

As indicated in the school improvement frame work (MOE, 2007b), Ethiopian school improvement program focuses on four main domains of schools namely: learning and teaching, students learning environment, school leadership and management, and community involvement. Each domain is also comprised of three key elements that contribute to the overall judgment of the domains.

### **2.1.2.1 Learning and Teaching**

As mentioned before, the ultimate goal of school improvement is maximizing students learning outcome. Learning and teaching process is also the key contributing area to the success of schools in maximizing the students' achievement. Hence, greater emphasis is given to the learning and teaching domain which is comprised of three elements such as teaching practice, curriculum, and assessment (MOE, 2007b).

If a school is to provide effective and appropriate teaching for all students, teachers must recognize and accommodate the unique learning needs and styles of individual students (Tasmania Department of Education, 2002). In line with this, the school improvement framework (MOE, 20007b) suggests that teachers should identify the special learning needs of their students as early as possible and accept the differences in their learning rate. The framework further suggests that teachers need to adjust their teaching approach according to the special learning needs of the students. Teaching, especially in an inclusive classroom must both focus on the needs of the individual and be flexible (Cuskelly and Forman, 1996) cited in Harris (2000). Different pedagogical approaches like devoting more time than

usual to certain areas of the curriculum, some frequent and discrete teaching of functional skills, more individual teaching, and physical aids and prompts may also be employed especially for people with special educational needs (Farrell, 2001). As suggested by UNESCO (2003), better use of child-to-child co-ordination also helps to contribute to the development of a more inclusive education that will improve conditions for all learners.

Concerning students with special talents and giftedness, the school improvement framework suggest that gifted and talented students should be able to develop their potential by being provided with more challenging works and enrichment programs (MOE, 2007b). However, effective teaching-learning process of students with special needs requires trained teachers and principals who are equipped with skills enable them to deal with the unique characteristics and needs of learners (Winzer, 1990).

In short, the preceding discussion suggests that in the school improvement efforts, educator should recognize the special learning needs of students and apply a relevant range of teaching approaches and strategies to meet their needs.

Curriculum is also another element in the learning and teaching domain which has to be given greater consideration both at the time of development and delivery as it has significant effect on the students' learning outcome. In any education system, the curriculum is one of the major obstacles or tools to facilitate the development of more inclusive system. The curriculum can facilitate the development of more inclusive setting when it leaves room for the school or the teacher to make adaptation (UNESCO, 2003). Concerning the need for making the curriculum inclusive, MOE (2007b) suggests that curriculum materials for example syllabus, students, text, and teachers guide should be evaluated, adapted and modified as needed in order to make them responsive to the students' development and needs. It needs to be meaningful, engaging and appropriate to the diverse needs of student.

Similarly, it is suggested that students of diverse backgrounds, abilities or needs must experience the benefit of a full and rich curriculum appropriate to their needs, interest and concern. They should be challenged and stretched in their learning and engage with a curriculum that deals with real world issues (Stainback and Stainback, 1992) cited in Mitchell (2005). Students with special learning needs

can engage meaningfully in the same curriculum as their peers if the appropriate accommodations are made (Shevin, M. Kenny, M. and Loxley, A. 2008).

The preceding discussions convey to us that school improvement efforts should also target ensuring that the school's curriculum is responsive and meaningful to the diverse needs of students both in content and delivery.

Besides the modifications required for the curriculum and teaching approaches, the teacher's assessment approach is also the third concern of school improvement process regarding the learning and teaching domain (MOE, 2007b). As noted by Rouse, Shriner, and Danielson (2000), in the assessment of students with special educational needs, the general national structure may not be suitable or sufficient on its own. Thus, accommodation is essential so as to make the assessment process accessible, meaningful, challenging and applicable for all learners with diverse backgrounds and needs. Assessment techniques should be designed and employed in line with the students' level of development and other special learning needs (MOE, 2007b).

In line with this, Rouse et al. (2000: 79) suggest that accommodations that might be required for assessing students of diversified needs and backgrounds may include:

- Flexible setting of an assessment (testing alone, in small group setting, at home, in room with special light).
- Flexible time or schedule for assessment like extended time, and more frequent breaks
- Using alternate presentation format for example Braille or large print edition, highlighted key words, signing of direction etc
- Using alternate response formats like pointing to response, giving response in sign language and so on.

In addition to modifying assessment techniques in line with the special needs of students, MOE (2007b) suggests that the assessment results should be used to improve the students learning. Similarly, Tasmania Department of Education (2002) noted that the purpose of assessment should not solely be to make judgments about student's achievement. It should also be aimed at assisting students' learning by evaluating the effectiveness of teaching programs and modifying instruction accordingly.

### **2.1.2.2 Student Learning Environment**

Educational environments need to be safe, supportive, welcoming and inclusive for all learners regardless of their disabilities and other differences. In line with this, Nielson (1997) suggests that creating a positive and comfortable learning environment is essential if the educational experiences are to be successful and rewarding for all students. Similarly, the school improvement framework, MOE (2007b) suggests that schools should create a learning environment that could effectively meet the diverse needs of the learners. Schools should ensure that their classrooms are places where all students feel valued, respected and welcomed.

Schools should ensure that they are learning centers where every child, regardless of his/her disability could be accommodated in (Tasmania Department of Education, 2002). Physical access and other learning environment facilities can determine the learner's range of learning activities and participation in and out of classrooms (UNESCO, 2003).

Schools and classrooms should be organized in such a way that facilitates ease of movement for those individuals who have difficulty in mobility, gives adequate space for a students to work independently, and minimizes visual and auditory distraction for children with sensory impairments (MacAulay, 1990) cited in Kaser (nd.).

Where physical factors pose barriers to learning and participation, especially for these who have difficulty in mobility, simple ramps and internal classroom arrangements can easily simplify the problem (UNESCO, 2001). Students can be helped to be integrated in to the classroom by simple and cost effective means of adapting the physical environment.

In addition to that physical accessibility of the schools and classrooms, the social environment of the schools could affect the effectiveness of the education of students with special needs. According to Nielson (1997), the attitudes and the expectation that the teacher holds towards students with disabilities could determine the degree of his/her commitment and support provided for the individual. Hence, it is suggested that in the process of including students with disabilities in the regular classroom, the teacher must convey positive and caring attitude toward them.

The preceding discussion suggest that if teaching-learning process is to be effective, both physical and social environment of the schools should be supportive, safe, and welcoming for all learners regardless

of their disabilities and other differences. To this end, school improvement efforts should consider the diverse needs of learners and should ensure that the school and its classrooms have been arranged and organized accordingly to meet the needs of students with special needs.

### **2.1.2.3 Community involvement**

School improvement requires changes in individuals as well as in organizations; and also these changes take the involvement and interaction of many people within and outside the school. Change will come surely, if every one is willing to participate in the process (Joseph, 2007). Due to this fact, though the target for educational change more often should be the local school, without the support from other agencies and people, the local school is unlikely to change (Neel, Bailey, and Ross, 1981).

Collaboration and partnership between the school staff and other stakeholders is essential to improve schools and ultimately to maximize the learning outcomes of all learners (MOE, 2007b). Ensuring the provision of quality education for all learners, especially for learners with special needs requires the involvement of many parties. In line with this, the Special Need Education Program Strategy (MOE, 2006:22) which is one of the main agenda in the SIP, stated that

*The effective implementation of the SNE strategy requires collaboration and cooperation between the concerned ministries, governmental and non-governmental organizations, beneficiaries and other civil society. It requires combined resources and expertise from all parties and individual and community support.*

Nielson (1997) also noted that educating students with special needs is a shared collaborative team effort. The involvement of students, parents, and other members of the community is essential to provide quality education for students with special needs and to create a climate that is supportive for the learning of all pupils (Ainscow, 1995, UNESCO, 2003). As noted by Lovell in Teferi (2007), parents and other community members are powerful resources to be utilized in the school. Their involvement helps to achieve provision of curricular and learning materials and to identify and address factors that contribute to educational problems such as low participation and poor academic achievement. They are also a good source of information concerning their children's reaction to the mainstreamed setting and relationships with peers, social and emotional adjustment, and difficulties on academic performance at home (Salend, 1983) cited in Salend (1999). In line with this, MOE (2007b) suggests that parents/carers should be encouraged to inform school management about the special needs of their children.

As noted by Stainback and Stainback (1990), peers can also make the integrated child feel welcomed, accepted, and secure in the regular classes. They can provide encouragement, understanding and support during stressful time in educational and social activities.

Though increased partnership between schools and parents including the wider community is believed to be essential for providing quality education for all learners, schools are often not sufficiently connected to the families and communities they are supposed to serve and collaborate with. For instance, Tibebe (nd) identified that school have not well established partnership with parents or families of children with hearing impairment.

#### **2.1.2.4 School Leadership and Management**

School leadership and management is among the most crucial force in school improvement process. Owning quality schools require quality leadership. Without high-quality, skilled and sustained leadership at school, as well as district and policy making levels, school improvement is unlikely to be achieved (McREL, 1999).

School leadership and management bodies are essentially expected to effectively set clear direction for the school, prepare strategic plan based on effective and through evaluation and set priorities for improvement leading to high quality education. They also establish link with parents, other agencies and the wider community to promote the care of students and enhance learning (ACT Government, 2004).

Effective leadership is a critical component in the development and maintenance of successful inclusive school community. As cited in Ainscow (1995), Servatius et al, (1992) noted that

*Providing the best possible education for students with a diverse range of backgrounds, gifts needs and abilities requires leader with a personal belief that all students can learn, and a commitment to providing all students access to rich curriculum and quality instruction.*

In line with this, the SIP framework (MOE, 2007b) also suggests that a school management should promote a culture of high expectation and belief that all students can achieve to their potential. It should also be committed to promoting equality of opportunities and inclusion.

As suggested by Ainscow (1995) and MOE (2007b) leadership functions should be spread throughout the staff group. It should come from a variety of sources in the school. In the most effective schools, the responsibility of school leadership is shared among teachers, staff members, parents and members of the entire education community. Such type of school leadership increases the students' opportunities to achieve at high levels.

## **2.2 School Improvement Experiences in other Countries and in Ethiopia**

### **2.2.1 Experiences of other Countries**

Though literatures regarding SIP in relation to special needs education are scarce, following are discussions on the experience of some countries regarding school improvement program and its implication for Ethiopia.

School reform efforts have made throughout most of the 19th century (Cuban, 1998) cited by Duchnowski, Kitash, and Oliveira (2004). For instance, efforts to improve schools during the 1950s and 1960s, as mentioned in Neale, Bailey, and Ross (1981), have made in American schools and have left a substantial record of positive achievement in schools. The United States of America and the United Kingdom were the pioneers in starting the school improvement project. The international school improvement project (ISIP) under the coordination of the Organization for Economic Cooperation Development (OECD) also extended the practice in the 1980s until 14 OECD countries (Reynolds, et al., 1996) cited in Harris (2000). Since then, many countries both developed and developing countries have been found implementing school improvement programs.

For instance, Plan International developed basic guidelines for school improvement program in 2001, and started implementing the program in different parts of the world. Until 2004, 20 countries in hundreds of primary schools across Africa, Asia, and America have started implementing the school improvement program (Plan International, 2004).

#### **1. School Improvement in Canada**

The Manitoba School Improvement Program (MSIP) was launched by a Canadian charitable foundation in 1991 (Harris, 2000). The program draws up on the professional knowledge of teachers than the expertise of academics. On going pressure and support was provided throughout the life of the

project. The program was expected to be school based and teacher initiated, focus on the needs of students, address fundamental issues of educational improvements and student learning for “at risk students” (Earl and Lee, 1998) cited by Harris (2000).

The Manitoba school improvement program is not prescriptive to specify the focus area of the program; rather it is defined by the school improvement team. It gives greater attention to the participation of the whole school community and to supporting “students at risk”. Provincial network of educators is established to provide support for professional development. Internal and external evaluations are key elements of the program. High level of commitment to teacher development and professional growth is valued. The training should be that can directly meet each school's specific needs and should be sought from within but not externally provided (Harris, 2000).

The Manitoba School Improvement Program (MSIP) has resulted in better professional development and commitment of teachers and increased involvement of the school community in the school improvement efforts. And consequently, the MSIP has achieved improved learning outcomes of all students including “Students at risk” (students with special learning needs).

As indicated in the preceding discussion, in many aspects, the MSIP has close similarities with the school improvement program in Ethiopia. For instance, both programs are school based, involve school improvement team and the whole school community, and employ internal and external evaluation. However, Ethiopia can take the experience of MSIP in that network of educators is required to provide support for professional development. In countries where trained human resources, like special needs educators, are scarce and access to formal training in SNE is limited, educators' network could help to minimize teachers' lack of proficiency to meet the special learning needs of students. The other experience that Ethiopia needs to share from MSIP is that trainings for teachers' professional development should be based on the specific needs of each school and should be sought from within. Since the needs of each school's and teacher's needs are likely to vary, professional development strategies should be based on the assessment of the needs of each school and teacher. Doing so helps to effectively address the limitations in each schools and teachers. It also likely to increase the participation and commitment of teachers in the teachers' professional development strategy.

## **2. School improvement in Boston**

As mentioned by Henderson (2001), the SIP that has been practiced in Boston public school is entitled the Whole School Improvement Program. The school improvement program has six components: instructional focus, looking at students' work, professional development, best practices, resources, and family and community involvement. Its mission is stated as "To help all students to learn and to succeed". Its mission is regularly articulated by staff members, family and students. Collaboration and adaptation are guiding principles of the program. Students of a wide range of disabilities and students which are considered as talented and gifted involve in the general education and learn together and from each other. The state's curriculum framework has been used with greater commitment to make adaptations as needed. Literacy has been chosen as instructional focus. Its goal is to enable students to read and write at or above grade level or to achieve the objectives stipulated in their individualized educational plan.

The entire staff along with parents was participated in extensive training on literacy. Adequate budget and resources, coaching, and supports have been provided. Maximum services and time was given to the focus area. Teachers meet every week to look at sample students' work, discuss the strategies used and to be used and share experiences. General education and special education teachers as well as other professionals together spent considerable time for professional development on instructional focus of literacy. They study strategies for teaching reading and writing, and required adaptations.

In addition to instructional best practices, collaboration and adaptation are powerful practices which improve teaching and learning for all. Accommodations such as books on cassette, assistive technology, or Braille to access and respond to print materials; and modifications that change the level of reading and writing for example using simplified version and forms of materials were used. Schedules have been set to ensure that staffs have opportunities to participate in looking at students' work and collaborate with each other. Other resources have been examined to ensure that they are most effectively used. School-based management which is comprised of parents' and teachers' representatives along with the principal has been used. The whole school improvement program in Boston has achieved improved learning out comes for all learners. Inclusion was served as a dynamic catalyst for improvements that have benefited the whole school community.

The lessons that Ethiopia needs to learn from the whole school improvement program of Boston are discussed below. As discussed earlier, the school improvement program of public schools of Boston gives emphasis on inclusion collaboration, and adaptation. It has helped schools to successfully accommodate students with a wide range of special learning needs. This suggests that countries like Ethiopia, in which larger population of children with disabilities are found and very limited special schools are available, should give greater consideration for inclusion of students with diverse learning needs, collaboration among professional and adaptation of curriculum and other aspects of instruction in school improvement efforts.

This could help schools to provide more accessible quality education for the larger population of students with special needs. The increased collaboration among professionals to work together and to share experiences among each other could also help the schools to effectively utilize the scarcely available human resources and to maximize the teachers' capacity to deal more affectively with the special learning needs of students in the regular classroom. It could also be serve as an immediate solution for the lack of special educators.

The experience of schools in Boston also suggest that our schools should set schedules of school related programs and activities in such a way that it provides time and opportunities for teachers to deal with students' work, share experiences from and work collaboratively with colleagues and neighborhood schools or cluster centers. This could enhance the motivation to be involved and commitment of teachers in the program as time constraint will not be attributed then.

The school's experiences further suggest that considerable time should be spent for professional development. In addition, the professional development strategy should be emphasized on specific focus areas of improvement and should simultaneously involve both general education and special needs teachers. It helps to attain well organized knowledge and skills concerning managing and assisting students with special needs and to imply the acquired experiences more effectively. In addition, it increases the opportunity of sharing experiences among each other and to strengthen their collaboration.

### **2.2.2 School Improvement in Ethiopia**

Since the formulation of the New Education and Training Policy (1994), Ethiopian government has made different educational reforms, especially in the title of Education Sector Review. Decentralized

educational management particularly at school level, is the result of such reforms. Similarly, currently the country has been found implementing the newly launched school improvement program. The program was promulgated in 2007. It is one of the components of the General Education Quality Improvement Package (GEQIP) (MOE, 2007a).

The current school improvement program framework was developed based on the result of the review of the best practices of the schools all over the country, related literatures and positive experiences obtained from its pilot program implemented in 2006 (MOE, 2007b). The main objective of the program is to maximize students' learning outcomes by improving the conditions that might have impact on it. As it was mentioned before, the program focuses on four major domains of school namely: learning and teaching, student environment, leadership and management, and community involvement. Again each domain has divided in to three elements as indicated in figure-1 below that have further classified in to a number of standards and performance indicators.

**Figure 1: Domains and Elements of Schooling**

<p><b>Learning and teaching</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teaching practice</li> <li>• Learning and assessment</li> <li>• Curriculum</li> </ul>	<p><b>Student Environment</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Student focus</li> <li>• Student empowerment</li> <li>• Student support</li> </ul>
<p><b>Leadership and Management</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strategic vision</li> <li>• Leadership behavior</li> <li>• School management</li> </ul>	<p><b>Community Involvement</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Partnerships with parents and carers</li> <li>• Engaging the community</li> <li>• Promoting education</li> </ul>

Under each domain, a number of issues which might have a direct impact on the teaching learning process are addressed. In addition, a wide variety of special needs education issues are considered in the framework of the school improvement program. The framework indicates a close link between the special needs education program strategy and the school improvement process.

The SIP framework (MOE, 2007b) demands schools implementing the school improvement program as per the recommendations indicated in the special needs education strategy. According to the framework, the school improvement efforts should include identifying and recording the special learning needs of students, providing facilities, arranging the classroom and school environment in such way that is accessible for children with disabilities and conducive for their learning. The schools are also expected to adapt and modify the curriculum and its delivery strategy to make it responsive to the needs of children with special needs. The school, to facilitate the education of children with disabilities, is also expected to establish effective partnership with parents, community and other agencies or sectors so as to enhance the provision of quality education for all learners. It is mentioned that challenging tasks and enrichment programs should be developed and provided so as to develop the potential of students with special talents and gifts to the maximum level (MOE, 2007b).

### **2.3 Characteristics of Effective Schools**

Though the types and degrees of activities of high performing schools are likely to vary, in most cases high performing schools tend to include evidences of the following characteristics (OSPI, 2002).

#### **1. Clear and Shared Focus**

In high performing schools, every body knows where they are going to. They all understand their role and are involved accordingly. In line with this, MOE (2007b) suggest that a school should commit itself to promote equality of opportunities and inclusion; and this commitment should be communicated to and shared by the whole school community.

#### **2. High Standards and Expectation**

In “effective schools”, teachers and staff believe that all students can learn and teachers can teach all students. There is also recognition of learning barriers for some students. And they believe that the barriers are not insurmountable.

#### **3. Effective School Leadership**

Effective leaders advocate, nurture, and sustain a school culture and instructional program that is conducive to student learning and staff professional growth. They have professional responsibility to monitor, moderate and evaluate the schools’ special needs education policy (MOE, 2007b).

#### **4. Frequent Monitoring of Teaching and Learning**

Effective schools continually adjust teaching and learning process based on frequent monitoring of students' progress and needs. Teachers use a range of teaching approaches to cater for the learning needs of all students/ Tasmania of Department Education, 2002).

#### **5. Supportive learning Environment**

Effective schools have safe, healthy and intellectually stimulating learning environment. Classrooms are organized to welcome, support and cater for diversity (Tasmania Department of Education, 2002). Their students feel respected and connected with the staff, and are engaged in learning.

#### **6. High Level of Community and Parent Involvement**

High performing schools are characterized by a sense that all education stakeholders have a responsibility to educate students. Parents, as well as social service agencies, and colleges/universities all play a vital role in this effort. In line with this, MOE (2006) suggests that schools should take advantage of all advice and assistance in its locality so as to help students with specific educational needs.

### **2.4 Challenges in Implementing School Improvement Program**

Poster and Day (1988) have noted that it is easy to demand school improvement, but difficult to achieve it as the school itself is a complicated social entity that has operated within changing, and sometimes conflicting, public expectations and local or national government interventions.

Regarding challenges in school improvement, Ainscow (1994) has also argued that schools and classrooms are complex environments involving a range of unpredictable interacting factors. Consequently, bringing about improvements is itself a complex at a time frustrating business. Change, particularly when it involves people in adopting new ways of thinking and behaving, is difficult and time consuming. A change to be achieved successfully, therefore, has to be understood and accepted by those involved. Ainscow further noted that in appropriate prioritization of areas of concern for improvement, lack of support and commitment in practitioners, teachers' resistance and the like are more likely to hamper the effectiveness of the school improvement efforts.

Since prioritizing the areas of concern for improvement is one of the major tasks in school improvement planning, failing to prioritize properly is likely to result in unsuccessful efforts. In line with this, Duchnowski, Kutash, and Oliveira (2004) noted that although the literature on school improvement has indicated that all domains are important, the complex nature of school improvement makes it difficult for an individual school to implement all of the strategies concurrently. Principals as well as teachers who try to meet their many demands often feel tired, confused, and fragmented (Seikaly, nd).

In addition, the changes in the society in which the school finds itself, and the changes that schools themselves go through in terms of its staff turnover, pupil enrollment, and changed priorities from the education authorities, etc can affect the sustainability of school improvement (Chinsamy, 2002).

The extent of pressure and support from districts is also another factor that can determine the effective implementation of school improvement. Experiences in schools that have been involved in school improvement projects indicate that success is linked to the balancing of pressure on and support for schools by the district office. For successful school development and school improvement the district office, therefore, has to have a clear plan for supporting its schools in prioritizing and sharing limited resources. Also, there should be a meaningful follow up mechanism (Ibid).

Also, the extent of common understanding and active involvement of stakeholders can determine the success of the school improvement efforts. In support of this idea, Costa and Leibmann (1997:11) stated that

*The changes we envision for our schools cannot happen without genuine communication, shared commitment, and informed and sustained support. If our schools are to become as good as they need to be, then those connected and touched by them must understand, have input in to, and support what has to be done and what is already being done-to make needed reforms reality.*

Fiske (1991) as cited by Costa and Leibmann (1997) also confirmed that the expected improvement cannot be realized unless the schools create genuine connections and alliance with the people they are designed to serve.

Teacher-resistance can also affect the effective implementation of educational reforms like school improvement. In line with this Winzer and Mazurek (2006) described that studies in Canada and Australia indicated that teachers appear relatively resistant to accept or learning techniques for handling exceptional learners. They express feelings of inadequacy in meeting all the diverse special needs of students in the classroom and deplore the lack of time to meet and collaborate with other teachers.

To sum up, as it was mentioned in the preceding discussion, such factors as lack of common understanding among the practitioners on the program, complexity of the change (innovation), unstability (changes) in school factors like: staff turnover, pupils enrollment, change in priorities, lack of pressure and support from districts, failure to prioritize concerns for improvement and teachers resistance are likely to negatively affect the effective implementation of school improvement program.

## **2.5. Conceptualizing Special Needs Education and its Implication for Ethiopia**

### **2.5.1 What is Special Needs Education?**

Special needs education (special education) is instruction designed for students with disabilities or gifts and talents who also have special learning needs. Some of these students have difficulty learning in regular classrooms; they need special education to function in school. Others generally do well in regular classrooms, but they need special education to help them master certain skills to reach their full potential in school (Ysseldyke and Algozzine, 1995).

The types of services students receive as part of their special education program vary according to the level of their learning needs. Public law 94-142 requires a continuum of educational services for students with disabilities, ranging from the least restrictive setting in regular classes to the most restrictive a special day school or residential facility (Gearheart et al., 1988). A student with a disability would be placed in one of the accessible placement alternatives based up on that student's individual needs, skills, abilities, and motivation (Stephens, Blackhurts, and Magliocca, 1982; cited by Salend, 1999).

## **2.5.2. Historical Background of Special Needs Education**

It is likely that disabilities have existed since the beginning of the human race (Gearheart, Weishahn, and Gearheart, 1992). Although there have always been exceptional children, there have not always been special educational services to answer their needs. (Hallahan and Kauffman, 1988)

According to Gearheart et al., (1992), the history of programs for individuals with disabilities can be examined through four historical eras: Early history (before 1800), Era of Institutions (1800 to 1900), Era of public school special classes (1900 to 1960/70), and Era of accelerated growth (1960 to present).

Before 1800, individuals with disabilities were likely to be thrown off a cliff, left in the wilderness or by a road side, or kept by the wealthy for entertainment. Such infanticide was supported by the common belief that the actions taken were not directed against human infants but against demons.

The period however was also accompanied by very few individual attempts to educate some individuals with disabilities. For instance Abbe del' Epee has opened a school in Paris for individuals who were deaf in 1760, were blind in Paris, and in 1789 Jean Marc Gasoared Itard has tried to educate a child with mental retardation who named Victor.

During the Era of institutions (1800 to 1900) individuals with disabilities more often were institutionalized. It seems to keep them out of the public eye. The first institutional programs were initiated in Europe for individuals with visual impairment and hearing impairment by 1800. European physicians are among the first professionals to become concerned about the welfare and education of children with disabilities (Hallahan and Kauffman, 1988). They initiated the first institutional programs in Europe for individuals with hearing and visual impairment.

Although educational efforts for students with disabilities were originated before 1900, such efforts were sporadic, met with limited acceptance, and had limited success. Considering this limitation, in 1895 Graham Bell suggested forming an annex to the public schools to provide special classes for individuals with sensory impairments and mental retardation. He further argued that in doing so such children would not have to leave their homes to attain institutions. Such efforts have resulted in the Era of public school special classes (Gearheart et al, 1992).

During the Era of accelerated growth (1960 onwards), improvement and growth in services for students with disabilities were achieved. These changes led to increased acceptance of persons with disabilities as individuals, more positive attitudes on the part of educators regarding their responsibility for education of students with disabilities, and actions of courts and government leaders to attempt to ensure continuing, appropriate education. As the result, students with disabilities receive much better services today than they did several years ago.

### **2.5.3 Education of Children with Disabilities in Ethiopia**

In developing countries, missionary groups were the first to start special schools for children with disabilities (Radda Barnen, 1995) cited in Abate (2001). Likewise, in Ethiopia, missionary groups and voluntary organizations have played great role in the expansion of education of children with disabilities. In its modern forms, education of children with disabilities was started by European missionaries by opening the first special school for children with visual impairment in 1917 (MOE, 1990) cited in Tibebe (1995). Additional schools were also opened in other disability areas through the support of missionaries and non-governmental organizations. For instance, Mekanisa school for the Deaf and Alpha school for the Deaf were established by American missionaries in 1963 and 1967 respectively (Berta, 2000) cited in Abate (2001).

Though education of children with disabilities in Ethiopia has been provided started before eight decades, its expansion is gradual, may be due to economic constraints as well as attitudinal factors (Tirussew, 1999). Limited efforts towards training professionals and teachers, providing educational materials, developing guides and arranging additional supports have also retarded the development of special needs education provision for several years (MOE, 2006). In Ethiopian, such settings as special schools, special classes /units, integrated classes or 'inclusive classes' have been widely used alternatives in the provision of education for students with disabilities (MOE, 2006).

### **2.5.4 Special Schools**

As mentioned above, special schools are one of the possible educational placement options of children with disabilities not only in Ethiopia but also in the world. Special schools are often designated as providing educational services for learners with particular special educational needs for example for children with deafness, blindness. However, in many special schools, the special educational needs are

Currently, in Ethiopia, the number of special classes has reached 144 and they have been found serving children with visual impairment, hearing impairment, and mental retardation (MOE, 2009). Despite their increment in number, special schools and classes have not been recommended to be the first option to be considered for children with disabilities due to their discriminatory effects and other reasons.

The preceding discussions suggest that separate education (special schools and classes) should not be the first primary options for educational placement of children with disabilities; instead, the regular classrooms should come first in mind. However, special schools and classes can essentially serve as agents for accelerating the mainstreaming of children with disabilities. To this effect, regular schools need to work in collaboration with special schools and classes and to use them as resource centers in the school improvement efforts (MOE, 2006, 2007b).

### **2.5.6 Inclusive Education**

Inclusive education refers to schools, centers of learning and education systems that are open to all children regardless of differences in their backgrounds, learning difficulties, and impairments. It is a process of identifying any barriers within and around the school that hinder learning; and reducing or removing these barriers. For this to happen, teachers, schools and systems may need to change. It requires changing attitudes, behaviors, teaching methods, curricula, and environments to meet the needs of all children. So that schools can better accommodate the diversity of needs that learners have and that learners are included in all aspects of school life (UNESCO, 2001).

Inclusive education requires to empower and engage families of children with disabilities as well as the community to participate in facilitating the education of children with disabilities and their over all well-being (Tirussew, 2005). It is noted that inclusive education is cost effective and most effective tool for combating discriminatory attitudes, creating welcoming communities, building an inclusive society and achieving education for all (UNESCO, 1994; cited by Tirussew, 2005).

In Ethiopia, due to the facts that the scarcely availability of special schools, the presence of a substantial number of students in regular schools whose special educational needs are unrecognized and unattended by the school or by classroom teacher, and cost effectiveness of inclusive education, the need to make a shift to inclusive education in the country is a necessary and logical choice for

addressing the education of children with special needs (Tirussew, 2005). It seems based on this logic that Ethiopia has developed and started implementing a special needs education program strategy that emphasizes inclusive education (MOE, 2006).

Accordingly, the nearly launched SIP document of the country (MOE, 2007b) has given greater consideration to the inclusion of children with disabilities to regular classrooms. It suggests that regular schools should be inclusive in their organization and functions.

### **2.5.7 Barriers in Education of Children with Disability**

Many factors are likely to affect the education of children with disabilities. Such barriers are multi-dimensional. As there are barriers to learning arising from the child's backgrounds (impairments, or disorders), many factors are also out of the condition of the child's background. As noted by Gearheart et al., (1988), it is not safe to assume the failure of a student is primarily the fault of the student; rather it may result from a disabling situation related to inadequacies in the learning environment, educational materials, instructional techniques, or interaction patterns in the school as well as in the classroom. Similarly, inappropriately designed curriculum, inappropriate media for teaching, inaccessible buildings, and lack of teachers who are well trained to work with children who have a wide range of needs are also considered as other barriers in education of children with disabilities (UNESCO, 2003).

Attitudinal barriers also adversely affect the students' learning. Yet, often, the most difficulty barriers to overcome are attitudes other people carry regarding people with disabilities. It comes out in the design of building and products, and in the patterns of interactions with and supports provided for them. Studies demonstrated that students with disabilities are rejected more frequently by their peers, identified as being less popular, are not selected as play mates, and are not well liked by teachers (Tasmania Education Department, 2002). This is, perhaps mainly due to the negative attitude they hold towards children with disabilities.

By emphasizing the impact of attitude on the education of children with disabilities, Sarson and Doris (1979), as cited by Padeliadue and Lampropoulou (1997), noted that effectiveness of any program is dependent on the attitudes of the people taking part in its implementation. It appears to be true mainly

due to the fact that individuals with positive attitudes will be willing to invest their effort depending on how much they positively value the program (Happer, 1980) cited by Abebe (2000).

Attitudinal barriers cannot be overcome simply through laws. The best remedy should be raising awareness on the potential of individuals with disabilities and familiarizing-getting people with and without disabilities to mingle as coworkers, associates, and social acquaintance. In time, most of the attitudes will give way to comfort, respect, and friendship (Mitchell, 2005)

In the schools where physical factors pose barriers to learning and participation, improving the physical environment of the centers of learning like building simple ramps, modifying internal classroom arrangements, supplying required facilities, etc enable students to participate in the range of learning activities in and out of the classroom (Kaser, nd). Strategies designed to tackle barriers to learning should also include accommodations on the curriculum, teaching materials, and teaching strategies in such a way that respond to the diverse needs of students; and developing teachers capacity to help students with disabilities. The proceeding discussion suggests that school improvement efforts should include strategies that tackle barriers.

### **2.5.8 School Improvement and Special Needs Education**

There is evidence; (Hocutt and McKinner, 1995; Sailor, 1991) cited by Duchnowski, Kutash, and Oliveira (2004), that the value of including all students regardless of their disability status in the total school experience is one of the themes that describe conceptual framework of school improvement. Efforts in school improvement programs should ensure that every child has equal opportunities to participate in as many school activities as possible so that he/she will gain maximum benefits from the school. To this effect, school improvement efforts should ensure that the school is a learning center where every child's aspirations will be nurtured, their learning need will be met and their welfare will be supported (Ruane, 2009).

The result of the study on school improvement in U.S (Duchnowski, et al., 2004) indicated that schools that are more actively engaged in school improvement appear to include special education programs in their efforts more than their less active counterparts. The result of this study illustrated the logical concept that special education and general education must work in concert to improve schools. It may support the necessity of including special education staff and special educations in development

# Chapter Three

## Methodology

### 3.1 Research Design

Since the main objective of this study is assessing the current practices of the implementation of school improvement program (SIP) at primary schools; and descriptive survey is most useful to describe the conditions that exist (Best and Kohn, 1999), descriptive survey approach was employed in this study. In this study, both quantitative and qualitative research approaches were employed. But greater emphasis was given to the quantitative approach.

### 3.2 Population and Sampling Method

#### 3.2.1 Area of the Study

This study was conducted on government primary schools of Gondar town where students with special needs are placed. Gondar Town is the capital of North Gondar Administrative Zone in Amhara National Regional State. It is found at a distance of 738 km from Addis Ababa to North.

There are 40 government and 14 private primary schools in Gondar City Administration. Among the 40 government primary schools, 21 primary schools are currently teaching student with special needs. One of them has a special needs education unit. There are 707 (M = 289, F = 418) teachers who are found working in these schools. Of them, 334 teachers are certificate graduated. But 372 and 1 teachers are diploma and first degree holders respectively. The total number of students with special needs in these schools is 470 (M= 301, F= 169) and it includes students with visual impairment (148), hearing impairment (70), orthopedic impairment (73), and mental retardation (162).

So as to delimit it to a manageable extent, this study was delimited to five of twenty one government primary schools in Gondar town. The researcher has reasons to select Gondar town as the study area. Due to his long exposure to educational services in the town, the researcher has observed that large number of students with disabilities is found in several primary schools of the town. He has also observed that in some schools the students were not actively involved in the lessons and other school activities. They were in a condition that calls for investigation. In addition, since the researcher is

familiar to the research site, he felt that the stakeholders would be cooperative to provide the required data so that he would be at ease to obtain detailed information about the issues under investigation.

The sample schools consisted of 270 teachers (M= 105, F= 165) and 350 (M = 234, F= 116) students with special needs. Among these, the number of students with visual impairment, hearing impairment, orthopedic impairment, and mental retardation is 129, 59, 28, and 234 respectively. Of those children with disabilities, 34, 29, 263, 17, and 7 are found in Kebele 16, kebele-19, Tsadiqu Yohannis, Atsie Fasil, and Meseret primary schools respectively. The sample schools also consisted of 50 school improvement committee members (M=30 (60%), & F= 20 (40%).

### **3.2.2 Sampling Methods**

As mentioned earlier, this study was conducted on five government primary schools where students with special needs were placed in. Four of the five sample primary schools (Meseret, Kebele-16, Kele-19 and Atsie Fasil primary schools) were selected using simple random sampling (lottery) method from 20 integrated schools; and the remaining one primary school (Tsadiqu Yohannis Primary School) was selected purposively. The reason for using purposive sampling method is that on one hand it is the only primary school in the town where special needs education unit is found, and on the other hand it is the primary school where the greatest number of students with disabilities in the town, 263 (55.9%) are found. Hence, the researcher believes that it was essential to include the practices of this relatively more populated and experienced primary school in his study so as to obtain relevant information about the issues under investigation.

Purposive sampling was also employed to select the 5 principals of the sample primary schools, and two educational officers in the town who are charged with the SIP (one from Gondar Town Administration Education Office and the other from North Gondar Education Department) as they have better exposure to the issues under investigation.

The researcher also employed stratified sampling method to select 57 (21%) of the total (270) teachers of students with special needs and 53 (15%) among the total (350) students with special needs. Stratified sampling was used for the reason that these subjects are already “naturally” stratified in to different strata like school, qualification, sex, and disability type. Having decided on the number of

respondents to be selected from each strata using stratified sampling method, the researcher, then, used simple random sampling method to select the actual respondents from each category. Accordingly, 57 (M =22 (38.6%), F = 35 (61.4%) teachers and 53 (M = 35) (66%), & F = 18 (34%) students were selected from all sample schools

Simple random sampling technique (lottery method) was also used to select 30 (60%) (M = 18 (60%), & (F= 12 (40%) out of 50 school improvement committee (SIC) members. The logic behind using simple random sampling technique was that SIC members are almost fairly distributed throughout the schools and believed to have nearly similar exposure to the practice of the SIP. The sample size (60%) from this category seems remarkably large. It was deliberately made for the reasons that since most of them comprised of teachers; the researcher has assumed that such individuals have increased exposure to the practice of the SIP in two ways: one as a manager due to being a member of the committee and the other as a teacher. For these reason, the researcher has believed and supposed that they are more likely to provide more relevant data for the study.

### **3.3 Data Gathering Instruments and Procedures**

For this study, such data gathering instruments as questionnaires, interview and FGD were used to obtain the required data. Document review was also used to obtain supplementary information concerning the plan and implementation of the SIP.

#### **A. Questionnaire**

Questionnaires were used to gather data from teachers, students and the school improvement committee. The questionnaires were designed as both open-ended and close-ended items. Most of close-ended items were formulated in five-point scales manner; & very few items with multiple choice item type were also included. Open-ended items were formulated in such a way that they let the respondents to freely express there idea.

The questionnaire has three major categories: the first part was about the respondents' personal characteristics, the second part was about the school improving activities and then sub divided in to four domains, and the third part is also about the main challenges that the schools encountered during the school improvement efforts.

The questionnaire was developed by the researcher based on the reviewed literatures and the policy document (the school improvement program framework), and was commented on by the respective academic advisor and colleagues for its relevance, completeness, and clarity, then, it was translated into Amharic and commented on again by my two colleagues (language teachers at Gondar College of Teachers Education) for the appropriateness of the translation.

Before being used for the actual purpose, the questionnaire was piloted on one of the members of the population schools (Hibret Primary School) which is out of the sample primary schools and checked for its appropriateness; and certain amendments were made accordingly. For instance, the pilot test result revealed that 2 items were stated in a broad and vague sense. Other three items were already mentioned in one or the other way in the preceding items. Accordingly, the broad items were reworded in a more simplified way, and redundancies were avoided.

Finally, after giving adequate orientation to both the respondents and the assistants of the researcher the edited questionnaire was administered to the respective respondents in face to face base by the help of assistants from Gondar College of Teacher's Education.

Five student teachers from Gondar College of Teacher Education were involved in distributing and collecting questionnaires, and in reading and filling the questionnaire for respondents with visual impairment. One special needs education teacher from Tsadiqu Yohannis Primary School was also involved in giving orientation through sign language for student with hearing impairment.

Among the 140 distributed questionnaires, 139 (99.3%) (i.e. 100% of teachers, 100% of SIC members, and 96.2% of students) were turned back, but 1 questionnaire from students was returned. Of them, 138 (98.6%) questionnaires were filled completely. But the remaining one which was distributed for a student was rejected for that it was filled incompletely. Hence, only 51 questionnaires (out of 53) of students were used for the analysis.

## **B. Interview**

Interview was used to gather data from the two educational officials and the five principals concerning the practice of the SIP. To this end, semi-structured interview guide was developed by the researcher and used to guide the discussion. After explaining the purpose of the interview for the interviewees

and getting their consent, the researcher has conducted the interview and recorded the information by both tape recorder and taking notes on the main themes of the discussion. He used tape recorder for that he could review the responses now and again during the analysis. The interview has taken on average 2:17 hours for each.

### **C. Focus group Discussion**

The focus group discussion was guided by open ended questions developed by the researcher from reviewed literature. It was conducted on 6 participants (M=3, F=3) who were supposed to have good participation and reflection on the discussion. They were selected by the help of their respective principals and based on their consent. The discussion was mainly focused on the major activities, challenges and possible solutions regarding implementing the SIP in light of addressing the special learning needs of students. Having clarified themes of the discussion by the researcher, the discussion was coordinated by one of the participants who is selected by the audience and moderated by the researcher. Like that of the interview, the FGD was recorded using tape recorder and taking notes.

### **D. Document Review**

In order to substantiate the data obtained from other sources and instruments, the researcher has reviewed documents which are related to the SIP. He has reviewed the school's strategic plan i.e. 2007/08 - 2009/10, the present academic year's annual plan (2009/2010), reports from the schools and education offices, formats, photographs, and policy documents. The central theme for the document review was to investigate what was planned and what was implemented concerning the SIP in relation to the SNE.

## **3.4 Data Analysis**

In this study, both quantitative and qualitative data were used and analyzed accordingly. Mixed methods approach (quantitative and qualitative methods) was used so that it can be helpful to come-up with well-validated and substantiated findings (Creswell, 2003). As Meriam (1988) noted in Creswell (2003), collecting diverse types of data best provides on understanding of the research problem and is helpful to strengthen the reliability as well as internal validity of the study (Meriam, 1988 cited in Creswell, 2003).

The quantitative data was analyzed using frequency counts and percentage of responses. The qualitative data which was obtained from interview, FGD, document review, and open-ended

questionnaires were analyzed in description forms following the analysis of each of the quantitative data as needed. Direct quotations were used to substantiate the quantitative data. In data interpretation, the researcher has employed triangulation and confirmation of information of different forms and different sources.

### **3.5 Ethical considerations**

Efforts were made in order to make the research process professionally ethical. To this end, the researcher has tried to clearly inform the respondents that the purpose of the study is purely academic as he introduced the purpose of the study in the introduction part of the questionnaires; and confirmed that respondents' confidentiality was protected. In addition, he informed them that their participation in the study was conducted only up on their consent.

During the interview and FGD, besides providing orientation similar to that was made for questionnaire respondents, getting the consent of interviewees and FGD participants was mandatory to record their response using tape recorder. Furthermore, in order to avoid misconception, at the end of each discussion the researcher has tried to get their confirmation by presenting the summary of the respondents for themselves. The researcher also didn't personalize any of the response of the respondents during data presentation, analysis and interpretation.

# Chapter Four

## The Results

This chapter of the study deals with the presentation of the data collected through questionnaire, interview, focus group discussion (FGD) and document review. The quantitative data from close-ended items of questionnaires are presented with the help of tables. The qualitative data which was obtained from open-ended items of questionnaires, interviews, focus group discussion (FGD) and document review was mingled with that of the quantitative data. While quoting in the presentation of the qualitative data, respondents were represented by letters with subscripts like R<sub>1</sub>, R<sub>2</sub>, ... for interviewees and F<sub>1</sub>, F<sub>2</sub>, ... for FGD participants. Under this chapter, such issues as the characteristics of respondents, the status of the implementation of the SIP with respect to the four domains in relation to special needs education, and encountered challenges are treated part by part.

### 4.1 Personal Characteristics of Respondents

Some questions were posed to respondents regarding their background characteristics like sex, age, grade, type of disability, qualification, work experience, training on special needs education and SIP, adequacy of the training on SIP, and their involvement in planning SIP. Accordingly, the personal characteristics of the respondents are summarized in table 1 below.

**Table-1: Personal Characteristics of Student Respondents**

No.	Variables		Respondents	
			Students	
			N	%
1	Sex	Male	35	66.0
		Female	18	34.0
		<b>Total</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>100</b>
2	Age	Below 14 years	4	7.5
		14 - 17 years	25	47.2
		18 – 21 years	14	26.4
		22 – 25 years	9	17.0
		Above 25 years	1	1.9
		<b>Total</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>100</b>
3	Type of disability	Visual imp.	32	60.4
		Hearing imp.	15	28.3
		Orthopedic imp.	6	11.3
		<b>Total</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>100</b>

As can be seen from table 1 and 2, among the total (147) respondents, 63 (45%) are females where as the remaining 77 (55%) is covered by male respondents. This implies that, though the majority is from males (55%), relatively fair distribution of respondents along their sex is kept in the study. The data indicates that the study incorporates the views (ideas) of both males and females. The data also conveys that women's participation at higher position of educational management is very low.

Regarding the age and grade levels of respondent students, table 1 indicated that the great majority 48 (90.5%) of respondent students are 14 years old and above, and also 41 (77%) of them are above grade 5 level. This implies that the majority of them are likely to have better understanding of issues under investigation so that they are capable to provide the required information properly.

Concerning the type of disability, as the majority of the total population of students with disabilities in Gondar Town are students with visual impairment, the greatest portion 32 (60.4%) of the sample students are students with visual impairment. The remaining 15 (28.3%) and 6 (11.3%) are from students with hearing impairment, and students with orthopedic impairment respectively. From this, we can understand that this study includes the reflection of students from diversified categories of disability. In addition, it conveys that there is enrolment discrepancy along students with various categories of disability.

**Table 2: Personal Characteristics of Educational Officers, Principals, SIC, and Teachers**

No.	-Variables		Respondents							
			Educ. Officials		Principals		SIC		Teachers	
			N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
1	Qualification	Certificate	-	-	1	20	8	26.7	27	47.4
		Diploma	-	-	4	80	19	63.3	30	52.6
		First degree	2	100	-	-	1	3.3	-	-
		<b>Total</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>28*</b>	<b>93.3*</b>	<b>57</b>	<b>100</b>
2	Training on SNE	More than a year	-	-	-	-	-	-	5	8.8
		One year	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	3.5
		Less than a year	-	-	-	-	8	26.7	17	29.8
		Not attended	-	-	-	-	22	73.3	33	57.9
		<b>Total</b>	-	-	-	-	<b>30</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>100</b>
3	Total work experience in education sector	11 – 15 years	-	-	-	-	-	-	5	8.8
		16 – 20 years	1	50	-	-	1	3.3	5	8.8
		More than 20 years	1	50	5	100	27	90.0	47	82.4
		<b>Total</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>93.3</b>	<b>57</b>	<b>100</b>
4	Work experience in their respective school	One year	-	-	-	-	2	6.7	4	7.0
		Two years	-	-	1	20.0	3	10.0	5	8.8
		Three years	-	-	-	-	5	16.7	16	28.1
		Above three years	-	-	4	80.0	20	66.6	32	56.1
		<b>Total</b>	-	-	<b>5</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>57</b>	<b>100</b>
5	Training on SIP and its adequacy	Yes and adequate	2	100	5	100	7	23.3	12	21.1
		Yes but inadequate	-	-	-	-	21	70.0	37	64.9
		Not attended	-	-	-	-	2	6.7	8	14.0
		<b>Total</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>57</b>	<b>100</b>
6	Participation in planning SIP	Yes	-	-	5	100	26	86.7	40	70.2
		No	-	-	-	-	4	13.3	17	29.8
		<b>Total</b>	-	-	<b>5</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>57</b>	<b>100</b>

\* Two of the school improvement committee members are students' representatives

With respect to the qualification of respondent teachers, school improvement committee (SIC), school principals, and education officials, table 2 indicates that 36 (38.3%) of them are found at certificate level, where as 53 (56.4%) and 3 (3.2%) are diploma holders and bachelor holders respectively. But the remaining 2 (2.1%) which are from SIC are students. Generally, the majority, (56 (59.6%)) of respondents are either diploma and/or first degree holders.

From this result, it seems possible to conclude that the majority of informants are more likely to have better insight on the themes of the study as they are found at good position in their academic qualification. In addition, it is indicated that the experience of teachers from both higher and lower level of educational status are incorporated in the study.

The other personal characteristic of respondents which is depicted in table 2 is work experience. In line with this, the data in the table indicates that 47 (87.7%) of teachers, 5 (100%) of school principals, 1 (50%) of education officials, and 27 (90%) of school improvement committee members have served more than 20 years either in teaching or in education management. The remaining 10 (17.6%) of teachers and 1 (50%) of education officers have from 11-20 years work experience in the education sector. The data in the same table also reveals that the great majority 45 (78.9%) and 25 (83.3%) of teachers and school improvement committee respectively have at least three years work experience in their respective present schools. From the result, we can conclude that the majority of respondents have better exposure on the course of implementing the school improvement program (SIP) in their respective schools from the beginning of the program.

As depicted in table 2, a very small portion 7 (12.3%) of teachers and none of SIC, school principals, and education officials have attended at least a one year formal training on special needs education. But one of the principals has attended a six months training on SNE and had worked for 10 years as SNE teacher. On the other hand, the majority, 49 (85.9%) of teachers, and all of SIC members are either they didn't attend any training or they have attended a very few days workshop or one course training on special needs education.

Based on this result, it seems possible to conclude that the majority of the population of the study is more likely to have lack of adequate knowledge and skills to manage or practice special needs education. But at SNE unit, due to the presence of trained principal and teachers, there is relatively to have better services for students with special needs.

Regarding their participation in training on SIP, the great majority, 84 (89.4%) of the total respondents, except the students have attended training (workshop) on SIP; but surprising amount 58 (69.1%) of them reported that the training provided on SIP was not adequate to implement the program effectively. If so, they could be with greater possibility of lacking adequate skills and knowledge to implement the SIP, and consequently, the effectiveness of the program could be hampered. On the other hand, as depicted in table 2, 40 (70.2%) of teachers, 26 (45.6%) of SIC members, and all school principals have involved in planning their respective school's improvement plan. This implies that they have better exposure & experience on the school improvement process in their respective school.

## 4.2 Issues Related to the Implementation of SIP

Under this section, school improvement activities that are expected to be carried out by primary schools in relation to special needs are presented and discussed with respect to the four school improvement domains namely: learning and teaching, students learning environment, school leadership and management, and community involvement. They are well treated below part by part.

### 4.2.1 The Learning and Teaching Domain

The data gathered regarding the learning and teaching domain is presented under this subsection.

**Table-3: Identification of Students' Needs and Teachers' Acceptance of Students' Difference**

N	Items		Responses										Total	
			0		1		2		3		4		N	%
o			N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
1	Identifying and recording the special needs of students	SIC	-	-	2	6.7	11	36.7	16	53.3	1	3.3	30	100
		Trs.	-	-	8	14.0	14	24.6	28	49.1	7	12.3	57	100
		<b>Total</b>	-	-	<b>10</b>	<b>11.5</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>28.7</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>50.6</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>9.2</b>	<b>87</b>	<b>100</b>
2	Considering the special needs of learners and accepting there difference in their learning rate	SIC	-	-	3	10.0	9	30.0	12	40.0	6	20.0	30	100
		Trs.	-	-	8	14.0	6	10.5	27	47.4	16	28.1	57	100
		Sts.	3	5.9	11	21.6	13	25.5	14	27.4	10	19.6	51	100
		<b>Total</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2.2</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>15.9</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>20.3</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>38.4</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>23.2</b>	<b>138</b>	<b>100</b>

**Key: 0 = Not at All    1 = Very Rarely    2 = Sometimes    3 = Always    4 = Very Often**

**SIC: school improvement committee**

**Trs. = Teachers**

**Sts. = Students**

As depicted in item 1 of table 3, 59.8% of respondent SIC members and teachers reported that special needs of students have been usually identified and recorded. But no respondent reported the absence of identification of special needs of students. It was confirmed by the data reviewed from different documents (statistical & performance reports) of all sample schools. The document revealed that students with sensory and some specific orthopedic improvements, and students with mental retardation have been already identified and recorded. Some teachers have also identified and recorded students based on their achievement level. However the methods that the teachers have used to screen

their students, however, lack professional procedures. They simply use the result of their students' academic performance as a determining criterion.

Some special needs of students are still seems to be over looked. It might have been due to misconceptions and lack of awareness of teachers and other stakeholders regarding other special needs of students. For instance, from the discussion with some of interviewees, the researcher has noted some principals do not consider students with HIV/AIDS as students with special needs.

From the above results, it is more likely to conclude that schools have been found at good position in their efforts to identify the special needs of their students. However, further efforts are still required. The above discussion also suggests the need for improving the awareness of teachers, SIC and school principals on the special needs of students.

The data in item 2 of table 3, 85 (59.8%) respondents have reported that the schools' community are aware of the special needs of students and accept they differ in their learning rate.

**Table-4: Responses Regarding Instructional Approaches of Teachers**

N	Items	Res po't	Responses										Total	
			0		1		2		3		4		N	%
1	Using varieties of teaching approaches that can meet the learning needs of SWDs	SIC	4	13.3	6	20.0	12	40.0	8	26.7	-	-	30	100
		Trs.	8	14.0	22	38.6	19	33.3	5	8.8	3	5.3	57	100
		Sts.	8	15.7	14	27.5	14	27.5	10	19.6	5	9.8	51	100
		<b>Total</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>14.5</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>30.4</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>32.6</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>16.7</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>5.8</b>	<b>138</b>	<b>100</b>
2	Using assessment methods that are responsive to the special needs of Learners	SIC	2	6.7	7	23.3	13	43.3	8	26.7	-	-	30	100
		Trs.	6	10.5	17	29.8	20	35.1	11	19.3	3	5.3	57	100
		Sts.	10	19.6	14	27.5	17	33.3	8	15.7	2	3.9	51	100
		<b>Total</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>13.1</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>27.5</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>36.2</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>19.6</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>3.6</b>	<b>138</b>	<b>100</b>
3	Using the assessment results as the basis for solving students' learning problems	SIC	2	6.7	8	26.7	13	43.3	7	23.3	-	-	30	100
		Trs.	8	14.0	12	21.1	20	35.0	12	21.1	5	8.8	57	100
		Sts.	20	39.2	15	29.4	9	17.6	6	11.8	1	2.0	51	100
		<b>Total</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>21.7</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>25.4</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>30.4</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>18.1</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>4.4</b>	<b>138</b>	<b>100</b>

**Key: 0 = Not at All 1 = Very Rarely 2 = Sometimes 3 = Always 4 = Very Often**

**SIC = School Improvement Committee**

**Trs. = Teachers**

**Sts. = Students**

Regarding the appropriateness of the teaching approaches to the special learning needs of students, in item 1 of table 4, majority of respondents, 76.5% (14.5% not at all, 30.4% very rarely, and 32.6% sometimes) reported that teachers do not usually use teaching methods that can meet the learning

needs of students with disabilities. On the other hand, the data shows that 22.5% (16.7% always and 5.8% very often) of respondents noted that teaching methods that have been mostly used are responsive to the special learning needs of students.

The data from item 1 indicates that, though the special learning needs of students are recognized and differences in their learning rates are valued usually, unlike the pedagogically expected interventions, the teaching approaches most of the time used in the lessons have not been in response to the special learning needs of students.

The responses obtained during focus group discussion, interview, and for open-ended questions are in line with this idea. Respondents, during the discussion, confirmed that due to lack of knowledge and skills on SNE, large class size, and work load, teachers rarely use teaching methods that can effectively meet the special learning needs of students. As per their responses, it is true especially for students with hearing impairments, mental retardation and for students with visual impairment in relation to some contents that require physical activities and visual perceptions. Regarding students with hearing impairment one of the interviewed principals described one of the experiences of his school as:

*... One student with deafness came to our school from the nearby special unit... He was a grade 4 student as that time... His teacher was in a great trouble to communicate with this student. He knows nothing about sign language. In addition, the student was not at good performance in writing. Informal gesture was the main means of communication between the teachers and the student. With tremendous efforts he passed to the next grade (i.e., grade 5). But being a grade 5 student that requires interacting with many teachers who do not have sign language skill was a highly frustrating event for that child. Even for his teachers. Teachers could not satisfy his needs. Finally, the child's fate became dropping out of the school. (R<sub>3</sub>, 09 April, 2010)*

Interviewed principals and FGD participants reported that those student with visual impairment and students with orthopedic impairment always excluded from Physical Education and Aesthetic lessons that require physical activities. It is true especially in integrated classes. For instance, one of the principals mentioned that regular classroom teachers consider them selves as they are not charged of the education of integrated students. Similarly, one of the respondents stated in the blank space of the questionnaire that *... there is no conducive condition for them to participate in non academic subjects like physical education, music, etc. (R<sub>2</sub>, April 08, 2010)*

The interviewees and FGD participants also reported but very few attempts of teachers to meet their students' learning needs. Some of the teaching approaches mentioned by the respondents in this respect include:

- Facilitating peer support (cooperative learning) especially for students with visual impairment,
- Making students with blindness to run a long the stretched string during physical education lessons,
- Helping the child with hand amputation to write using his foot fingers,
- Teaching maps with string and using abacus to teach simple mathematical operations for students with visual impairment.

However, the participants of the discussion confirmed that such encouraging attempts are made mostly only in the special unit which might have been due to the presence of well trained special needs education teachers. Other schools, even most teachers of the integrated classes of the special unit, do not adjust their teaching approaches to the special learning students. In their response to the blank spaces in the questionnaire, most of the respondents have mentioned that no significant effort is made to adjust teaching methods according to the needs of the students. In line with this, one of the respondent teachers said in his own words as: “ልዩ ፍላጎት ያላቸው ተማሪዎች አብዛኛውን ጊዜ የሚማሩት እንደሚኖሩትም ተማሪ እንደ ችግራቸውን መሠረት ባደረገ መልኩ አይደለም።” *students with special need in most cases have been taught as any other students, there is no other specials technique in line with their needs.*

Item 2 in table 4 reveals how often teachers use suitable assessment techniques for students with special needs. The data regarding this item indicates that the majority of respondents, 76.8% (13.1% not at all, 27.5% very rarely, and 36.2% sometimes) reported that teachers do not usually use assessment techniques that are suitable for students with special needs. On the other side, 23.2% (19.6% always & 3.6% very often) of respondents replied that teachers usually use assessment techniques that are responsive to the special needs of students.

As per the information obtained from the blank space in the questionnaire, from the interview of principals and also from focus group discussion, the assessment approaches and conditions that teachers mostly employ do not address the diverse needs of their students. In line with this, respondents reported that there are many occasions in which test items are prepared uniformly for all

students regardless of the special needs of students. There are also occasions when some test or exam items of certain contents, which are supposed to be not suitable for some students with disabilities, have been simply omitted by teachers instead of rearranging it in a manageable way or substituting it with another item.

They also added that the conditions in which students with visual impairments have been assessed are not suitable for students with special needs. As it was repeatedly said and stated by respondents there are many occasions in which a single teacher alone tests (examines) up to four or five students with blindness simultaneously. Regarding the problem they encountered in this respect, one of the respondent students (with visual impairment) stated that (... ሶስትና ከዛ በላይ ሆነን ስንፈተን አንዳንድ ጊዜ መመሪያ አኛን ከፈተና ወረቀታችን ጋር ለማዛመድ ወይም የሠጠነውን መልስ ለማስታወስ ስለሚቸገር የአንዳችን መልስ ከሌላችን ይመዘግባል። በመሆኑም የውጤት ማፋለስ ያስከትልብናል።)

*...While a teacher examines 3 and above students at a time, since some times the teacher fails either to correspond the student with his/her test paper or to remember the student's response (answer), one student's answer will be recorded and scored to another student*

They further mentioned that since students with visual impairment usually have examined after other students are examined and are free to leave their classes, their noise distracts the examinees not to listen to the question attentively. They reported that their noise distracts their attention not to focus on the exam. They also added that some teachers do not give adequate time for working on exams. One of the students stated, in this respect, that /አንዳንድ መምህራን በሚፈትኑበት ጊዜ ያጣድፉናል በቂ ጊዜም አይሰጡንም/ some teachers put us in hurry while working on exams From the data mentioned above we can understand that the assessment techniques and conditions that teachers mostly used are not suitable to address the special learning needs of students. It did affect the performance of the students during exam and limit the range of contents that the students are accessed to. So that teachers are expected to do much more in this respect.

As to how often teachers use the assessment results as the basis for solving learning problems, as indicated corresponding to item 3 in table 4, the majority 77.5% (21.7% not at all, 25.4% very rarely, and 30.4% sometimes) of respondents indicated that teachers do not usually use the assessment results as the basis for solving the learning problems of students. On the other side, 22.5% of total

respondents replied that teachers usually use the assessment results as the basis for solving the learning problems of their students. With respect to this, most of the FGD members (which are teachers of students with special needs) mentioned that in most cases teachers use the assessment results *for the sake of assigning mark and reporting students' progress*. Interviewed principals also added that teachers' assessments are more of summative.

**Table 5: Adaptation of curriculum materials and other academic tasks**

Item number	Items	Respo'ts	Responses										Total	
			0		1		2		3		4		N	%
			N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%		
1	Adapting and modifying the curriculum materials in line with the special needs of students	SIC	12	40.0	10	33.3	5	16.7	3	10.0	-	-	30	100
		Trs.	29	50.9	15	26.3	8	14.0	5	8.8	-	-	57	100
		<b>Total</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>47.1</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>28.8</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>14.9</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>9.2</b>	-	-	<b>87</b>	<b>100</b>
2	Adapting contents activities, exercises of the lesson to the special needs of students	SIC	6	20.0	14	46.7	7	23.3	3	10.0	-	-	30	100
		Trs.	13	22.8	24	42.1	11	19.3	9	15.8	-	-	57	100
		Sts.	24	47.1	15	29.4	5	9.8	4	7.8	3	5.9	51	100
<b>Total</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>31.1</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>38.4</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>16.7</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>11.6</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2.2</b>	<b>138</b>	<b>100</b>		

**Key: 0 = Not at All 1 = Very Rarely 2 = Sometimes 3 = Always 4 = Very Often**

**SIC = School Improvement Committee**

**Trs. = Teachers**

**Sts. = Students**

Item 1 in table 5 refers to the adaptation of the curriculum and teaching materials so as to make them inclusive. As the data in the table clearly portrays, indeed the great majority of respondents, 90.8% have reported that teachers do not usually made adaptations on the curriculum and other teaching materials in line with the special learning needs of students.

Similarly, the data corresponding to item 2 in the same table also revealed that significant portion of respondents; 86.2% (31.1% not at all, 38.4% very rarely, and 16.7% sometimes) replied that teachers

do not usually adapt contents, activities, exercises etc. of the lessons according to the special needs of their students. On the other hand, only 8.8% of the respondents responded positively regarding the adaptation of curriculum materials; again 13.8% of respondents replied that teachers usually adapt contents, activities, and exercises of the lessons according to the learning needs of their students. However, the researcher was not able to find documentary evidence in this respect.

As per the responses of interviewees and FDG participants, schools do not make significant adaptations on the curriculum materials in the intention of meeting the special learning needs of students. As to them, the major measures that have been taken in this respect are either *omitting the content* or *“excluding students from attending the subject matter*. They also added that for the subjects and contents that they are supposed to be “appropriate” for those students with special needs, teachers in most cases present the regular curriculum as it was. Confirming this idea, one of the interviewees (principal) said:

*...No modification of curriculum materials was made for these students. ...not more than presenting the regular curriculum materials as we do for other students. (R<sub>4</sub>, April 13, 2010)*

In addition, FGD participants mentioned that even the special unit teachers have no adequate curricular materials for education of students with special needs. They use either out dated materials or notes and modules that they have used during their pre-service training. Lack of due attention from concerned bodies and lack of knowledge and skills in teachers are attributed to these problems.

**Table 6: Peer Support among Students and Participation of Students with Special Needs in the Lessons and Co-Curricular Activities**

NO	Items	Respondents	Responses											
			0		1		2		3		4		Total	
			N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
1	Encouraging students with disabilities to actively participate in the lesson	SIC	-	-	4	13.3	5	16.7	13	43.3	8	26.7	30	100
		Trs.	4	7.0	5	8.8	18	31.6	20	35.1	10	17.5	57	100
		Sts.	2	3.9	11	21.6	13	25.4	15	29.4	10	19.6	51	100
		<b>Total</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>4.3</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>14.5</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>26.1</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>34.8</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>20.3</b>	<b>138</b>	<b>100</b>
2	Encouraging students with special needs to participate in co-curricular activities	SIC	4	13.3	8	26.7	10	33.3	8	26.7	-	-	30	100
		Trs.	3	5.2	5	8.8	28	49.1	14	4.6	7	12.3	57	100
		Sts.	21	41.2	14	27.5	7	13.7	7	13.7	2	3.9	51	100
		<b>Total</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>20.3</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>19.6</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>32.6</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>21.0</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>6.5</b>	<b>138</b>	<b>100</b>
3	Encouraging peer support among students with disabilities and without disabilities	SIC	-	-	4	13.3	5	16.7	15	5.0	6	20.0	30	100
		Trs.	-	-	8	14.0	12	21.1	26	45.6	11	19.3	57	100
		Sts.	-	-	8	15.7	15	29.4	18	35.3	10	19.6	51	100
		<b>Total</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>14.5</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>23.2</b>	<b>59</b>	<b>42.7</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>19.6</b>	<b>138</b>	<b>100</b>

**Key: 0 = Not at All 1 = Very Rarely 2 = Sometimes 3 = Always 4 = Very Often**

**SIC = School Improvement Committee**

**Trs. = Teachers**

**Sts. = Students**

Concerning the encouragement of students with special needs to actively participate in the lesson, item 1 in table 6 indicates that 55.1% of respondents reported that teachers usually encourage students with special needs to actively participate in the lessons. Nearly similar proportion, 44.9% of informants indicated as teachers do not usually encourage students with special needs in the lesson. The data reveals that the schools are found relatively at good position regarding making students with special needs active participant in the lessons.

However, this result seems in contrast to the finding from item 1 of Table four. The finding corresponding item 1 of table four indicated that, instead of encouraging students to participate in the lesson by designing special teaching strategies based on the students' needs, there are occasions when students with special needs (with disabilities) have been excluded from some lessons.

Item 2 in table 6 refers to how often students with disabilities have been encouraged to participate in co-curricular activities. The data corresponding to this item indicates that 72.5% (20.3% not at all, 19.6% very rarely, 32.6% sometimes) of respondents reported that students with special needs have not been usually encouraged to participate in different co-curricular activities. The remaining 27.5% also reported that such students have been usually encouraged to participate in co-curricular activities. The data obtained from other sources also conveys low involvement of students with disabilities in co-curricular activities. For instance, confirming lack of increased encouragement of students with disabilities to participate in co-curricular activities, one respondent SIC member stated in the blank space of the questionnaire that: ... *there is very limited effort of encouraging students with disabilities to participate in different clubs*. Another respondent teacher also stated that:

*...Even though some students are interested to participate in different areas like music, painting (drawing), drama and literature, due to lack of required resources and teachers who encourage them; these students (students with disabilities) have no opportunities to participate in such co-curricular activities.*

On the other side, though they are limited, respondents reported certain efforts that have been made to give opportunities for students with disabilities to participate in co-curricular activities. In line with this, during the FGD, the participants mentioned that students with disabilities have been sometimes invited to participate in dram and literature club. For instance, they mentioned that some students with blindness have been invited *to present poems during flag ceremony*; very few students with deafness have been also invited *to paint instructional drawings on the walls of classrooms*. However, they confirmed that the effort made so far are limited. They have been mainly practiced at the special unit.

From the preceding discussions, it could be possible to conclude that students with disabilities have not been provided adequate opportunities to participate in co curricular activities. For that they are deprived of the benefits that they would have had if they were been involved.

The data corresponding to item 3 in Table 6 indicates that significant portion of respondents, 62.3% (42.7% always, and 19.6% very often) replied that teachers usually arrange strategies for students with disabilities to be supported by other students. But 14.5% and 23.2% respondents reported that teachers facilitate peer support among students rarely and sometimes respectively. It is interesting to mention

that none of the respondents mentioned absence of facilitating peer support between students with disabilities and other students. Regarding teachers' efforts in facilitating peer support, students in their response in the blank spaces mentioned that teachers usually organize groups or pairs of students with and without disabilities in which one supports the other. It was also mentioned above during the analysis made for item 1 in table four.

**Table- 7: Treatments and Supports for Students with Special Needs**

No.	Items	Resp on'ts	Responses										Total	
			0		1		2		3		4		N	%
1	Treating students equally regardless of their disabilities and other differences	SIC	-	-	2	6.7	3	10.0	10	33.3	15	50.0	30	100
		Trs.	-	-	8	14.0	14	24.6	28	49.1	7	12.3	57	100
		Sts.	-	-	7	13.7	17	33.3	23	45.1	4	7.8	51	100
		<b>Total</b>	-	-	7	12.4	34	24.6	61	44.2	26	18.8	138	100
2	Giving extra time and support for SWDs to accomplish academic tasks successfully	SIC	4	13.3	9	30.0	9	30.0	8	26.7	-	-	30	100
		Trs.	3	5.3	14	24.6	23	40.3	15	26.3	2	3.5	57	100
		Sts.	14	27.5	16	31.4	10	19.6	8	15.7	3	5.9	51	100
		<b>Total</b>	21	15.2	39	28.3	42	30.4	31	22.5	5	3.6	138	100

**Key: 0 = Not at All 1 = Very Rarely 2 = Sometimes 3 = Always 4 = Very Often**

**SIC = School Improvement Committee**

**Trs. = Teachers**

**Sts. = Students**

In item 1 of Table 7 respondents were asked to rate how often students have been treated equally regardless of their disabilities and other differences. Accordingly, the majority of the respondents 63% (44.2% always & 18.8% very often) reported that students with disabilities have been usually treated equally regardless of their disabilities and other differences. But 37% of the respondents replied as they have been treated equally either very rarely (12.4%) or sometimes (24.6%). None of the participants reported the absence of equal treatment of students.

The participants of the FGD also mentioned that not only teachers but also students have positive relationship with and respect to students with disabilities. They reported that students without

disabilities are cooperative to their peers with disabilities both in and out of the classrooms. They also noted that the SNE teachers' effort of teaching hearing students during flag ceremony has contributed to development of positive relationship between students with and without hearing impairment. As to them, regardless of their limited capacity, teachers also usually try to treat students with disabilities as equally as possible.

The preceding discussion conveys that there is no significant social discrimination of students based on their disabilities and other differences. On the contrary however, the FGD participants and principals reported that children with hearing impairment (deafness) have not been treated as equally as students with visual impairment and students with mental retardation with respect to material and financial support. They noted and the researcher has also confirmed during interview with the respective educational officer that the woreda education office does not allocate budget for students with hearing impairment as it does for students with visual impairment and mental retardation. One of the FGD participants mentioned that such type managerial practice is *violating child convention*.

As the data corresponding to item 2, in Table 7 indicates, the majority of respondents 73.9% replied that students with special needs have not been usually provided extra support to accomplish the academic tasks successfully. It was confirmed by 78% of respondent students. But 26.5% (22.5% always and 3.6% very often) of them reported as such support is usually provided for these students. Students in their response in the blank space of the questionnaire noted that except some supports provided by few teachers, there is no adequate extra support as such. It was confirmed by their words which say:

*“...አብዛኛውን ጊዜ ግን ከራሳችን የግል ጥረትና ከጓደኞቻችን እርዳታ ባሻገር የተለየ እገዛ አይደረግልንም very few teachers arrange tutorial program, some teachers also help us coming close to us. But in most cases there is no special support for us except our personal efforts and our peers support,”*

They also mentioned that teachers usually treat students with disabilities as they do for any other students.

But, on the other side, the data from FGD indicted that teachers in the special unit have been assisting students with visual impairment in integrated classes in translating their Braille written responses of exercise in to hand writing so as to make the students' assignment works legible to the regular class teacher for that they cannot read Braille written materials.

From the above practice, though the aforementioned encouraging attempt has been made by special needs education teachers, it is fair to conclude that regular classroom teachers remains a lot to do in providing special supports for students with disabilities so as to facilitate their learning.

#### **4.2.2. The Students' Learning Environment**

This section deals with the school improvement activities that are supposed to be carried out by the primary schools in order to create and maintain conducive learning environment.

**Table 8: Responses Regarding the Provision of Resources and Programs**

N o.	Items		Responses										Total	
			1		2		3		4		5		N	%
			N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%		
1	Efforts to fulfill SNE teachers	SIC	9	30	10	33.3	5	16.7	5	16.7	1	3.3	30	100
		Trs.	17	29.8	18	31.6	8	14	7	12.3	7	12.3	57	100
		<b>Total</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>29.9</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>32.2</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>14.9</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>13.8</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>9.2</b>	<b>87</b>	<b>100</b>
2	Provision of facilities and materials required for the education of SWDs	SIC	17	56.7	5	16.7	6	20	1	3.3	1	3.3	30	100
		Trs.	29	50.9	19	33.3	8	14	1	1.8	-	-	57	100
		Sts.	21	41.2	14	27.4	8	15.7	6	11.8	2	3.9	51	100
<b>Total</b>	<b>67</b>	<b>48.6</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>27.5</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>15.9</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>5.8</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2.2</b>	<b>138</b>	<b>100</b>		
3	Provision of challenging works and enrichment programs for “gifted and talented” students	SIC	9	30	11	36.7	7	23.3	3	10	-	-	30	100
		Trs.	19	33.3	25	43.9	11	19.3	2	3.5	-	-	57	100
		Sts.	19	37.3	17	33.3	12	23.5	3	5.9	-	-	51	100
<b>Total</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>34.1</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>38.4</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>21.7</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>5.8</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>138</b>	<b>100</b>		

**Key: 1 = Very Low 2 = Low 3 = Medium 4 = High 5 = Very High**

**SIC = School Improvement Committee**

**Trs. = Teachers**

**Sts. = Students**

The data corresponding to item 1 in Table 8 indicates that the majority of respondents, 62.1% reported that the efforts that have been made at different levels to fulfill special needs education teachers is low. Where as 23% of the respondents also replied that the efforts made in this respect are high. The remaining 14.9 % respondents also reported as the effort to fulfill such teachers is medium. As per the data obtained from interview conducted on 08 April, 2010 with the woreda educational officer, in order to fulfill teachers that could teach students with special needs, *a two days workshop* was provided for 200 primary school teachers on issues of special need education. In addition, 2 teachers are also found attending formal training in special needs education department at different universities.

On the other side, the data obtained from the interview conducted with the schools principals and the data reviewed from documents at Gondar Woreda Education Office indicated that except the 7 special needs education teachers at Tsadiqu Yohannis Primary School, (where the only special needs education unit in the woreda is found), no qualified special needs education teacher is assigned in any other primary schools. That is, the ratio of special needs education teacher to school is calculated to be about 1:4 which is very far away from the expected standard. Besides this, all these teachers are assigned at the same school.

Item 2 in Table 8 deals with the extent of provision of facilities and materials required for the education of students with disabilities. As the data corresponding to this item reveals, the great significant portion of respondents, 76.1% replied that the provision of facilities and materials required for education of students with special needs is low. Again, 15.9% and 8.0% of respondents have reported as the provision of such facilities and materials is medium and high respectively.

Regarding the provision of such materials and facilities, the schools principals as well as the FGD participants have also mentioned that there is greater scarcity of different materials that are required for the education of students with disabilities. As to them, the problem is severe, especially for students with visual impairment. Braille and stylus-slate, and Braille written reference and supplementary materials are highly scarce. The respondents noted that, due to its scarcity, some students with visual impairment use the available materials turn by turning by borrowing from the unit.

While mentioning the severity of the problem, one of the FGD participants said that:

*“...ቀናት ባለፉ ቁጥር በብሬል የመጻፍ ክህሎታቸው እየቀነሠና እየጠፋባቸው እንደሆነ ሁሉ ይነግሩናል።... Due to lack of Braille and stylus-slate, some students were unable to write. They have been confined to only listening. Even they report to us as their skill to write using Braille has been faded up as time has gone.”*

/F<sub>1</sub>, 12 April, 2010/

In addition, participants of the FGD (from the special unit) noted that the provisions of materials required for education of students with mental retardation are also highly limited. Regarding this, one of the special unit teachers, during the FGD, said:

*“...ሙያዊ ክህሎታቸውን ለማዳበር የሚያስችል ምንም ማቴሪያል የለም ማለት እችላለሁ። ... I think students with mental retardation need to develop vocational skills in order to run independent life. But in this school (i.e. the special unit), I can say that there is no any material that can help them to develop vocational skills.” (F<sub>2</sub>, 12 April, 2010)*

Furthermore, the respondents also noted that the provision of materials for students with disabilities seems mainly left for NGOS, as the available materials were donations by them.

The participants, however, didn't deny what has been done by the schools and woreda education office. They mentioned and also confirmed during the interview at wored education office that, in the present academic year, the office has provided only 16 Braille and stylus-slate for the special needs education unit which is insignificant as compared to its demand. In addition, some schools have also provided the recorded radio programs and tape recorder for some students with blindness. But they reminded that most of these efforts are usually made by either the contribution of the charity club or from the donation of NGOS. The researcher has witnessed this by cross checking those measures that have been made by the schools in this respect with the schools' annual plans. Almost nothing was indicted in the plans.

Item 3 of Table 8 requests respondents to rate the extent of provision of challenging works and enrichment programs in their own school so as to develop the potential of “gifted and talented” students. Accordingly, the majority of respondents, 72.5% (34.1% very low and 38.4% low) replied that the provision of challenging works and enrichment programs for “gifted and talented” students is low. Again, 21.7% of the total respondents also responded as the provision of such works and programs is medium. But it is only 5.8% and none of the respondents gave the responses high and very high respectively. The data obtained from the interview which was conducted with most of the

schools' principals also confirmed that the provision of special programs for "gifted and talented" students is almost negligible. Confirming this idea, one of the aforementioned interviewees replied as follows: ... *We didn't consider them so far. For that I can say that we have done nothing for them.* (R<sub>2</sub>, 08 April, 2010)

But, even though it is limited and not more than paperwork, the researcher has noted a good beginning in one of the sample schools. The principal of the school mentioned during the interview and the researcher has witnessed from the document of the Teacher Development Program Committee of the school that the school has decided on 28 October, 2009 to assist students who have better performance on natural science areas and whose vision is being a "scientist" to realize their vision. The committee named the program with the title of "የነገወ ሳይንቲስት" *The Future Scientist*. In addition, the school, on behalf of Drama and Literature Club, also proposed to prepare a competition on traditional dancing and *beauty contest* for those students who are supposed to have special talent on the area. However, as the principal mentioned, these proposals have not been changed in to practice until the researcher has collected this data.

The preceding results indicate that the schools' effort in providing challenging works and enrichment programs for "gifted and talented" children is almost insignificant. It is very incompatible with what the SIP framework requests schools to do in this respect.

**Table 9: The Schools' Physical and Social Environment**

No.	Items	Respon dents	Responses										Total	
			1		2		3		4		5		N	%
			N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%		
1	Making the physical environment of the school accessible by SWDs	SIC	15	50	6	20	6	20	2	6.7	1	3.3	30	100
		Trs.	18	31.6	23	40.3	9	15.8	4	7.0	3	5.3	57	100
		Sts.	20	39.2	13	25.5	9	17.7	7	13.7	2	3.9	51	100
		<b>Total</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>38.4</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>30.4</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>17.4</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>9.4</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>4.4</b>	<b>138</b>	<b>100</b>
2	Arranging classroom in line with the special needs of students	SIC	2	6.7	6	20	10	33.3	10	33.3	2	6.7	30	100
		Trs.	3	5.3	6	10.5	20	35.1	17	29.8	11	19.3	57	100
		Sts.	1	2.0	6	11.8	19	37.2	13	25.5	12	23.5	51	100
		<b>Total</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>4.4</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>35.5</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>18.1</b>	<b>138</b>	<b>100</b>
3	Improving the expectation of the school community towards the achievement of SWDs	SIC	-	-	2	6.7	11	36.7	16	53.3	1	3.3	30	100
		Trs.	4	7.0	15	26.3	22	38.6	15	26.3	1	1.8	57	100
		<b>Total</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>4.6</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>19.5</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>37.9</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>35.6</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2.3</b>	<b>87</b>	<b>100</b>
4	Cooperation b/n SNE teachers and the regular teachers	SIC	4	13.3	5	16.7	8	26.7	10	33.3	3	10	30	100
		Trs.	6	10.5	15	26.3	13	22.8	20	35.1	3	5.3	57	100
		<b>Total</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>11.5</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>24.1</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>34.5</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>6.9</b>	<b>87</b>	<b>100</b>

**Key: 1 = Very Low 2 = Low 3 = Medium 4 = High 5 = Very High**

**SIC = School Improvement Committee**

**Trs. = Teachers**

**Sts. = Students**

Concerning the physical accessibility of buildings of the school, the data on item 1 of table 9 reveals that the majority of respondents (68.8%) mentioned that the physical accessibility of different service (classrooms, libraries, toilettes, laboratories, etc) is low (38.4% very low & 30.4% low). Among the total respondents, 17.4% also responded that the accessibility of such services is medium. 13.3% of the participants also rated as they are highly accessible (9.4% high and 4.4% very high).

Regarding the same item, some of the respondent students mentioned that classrooms, libraries, and toilettes are not easily accessible for students with mobility difficulty. The data obtained from the principals confirmed that rooms for these services have no ramps. In relation to the physical accessibility of the school's buildings, one of the principals said:

*Our library is not the building where a person with wheelchair can enter and be served. The same is true for the latrine. For instance, the child with wheelchair has no any option except excreting either out side the latrine or at his home. /R5, 13 April, 2010/.*

Similarly, one child with wheel chair stated that:

*At the gate of my class there is large stage. Therefore I couldn't get into and get out of the classroom alone unless my friends helped me. The toilette is also difficult for me to use. Because, its stages are very high. Therefore, I couldn't excrete unless I went back to my home." ከትምህርት ቤት ስለቀቅ እቤቱ ካልሆነ በስተቀር ት/ቤ መዕዳዳት አልችልም"*

In addition, some students and teachers (including a teacher with visual impairment) mentioned that some times stones and construction materials (wood) *stored any where irresponsibly*. As the result, it distracts the safe movement of individuals with blindness. On the other side, it was also repeatedly mentioned that facilitating peer support among the students was the most commonly practiced measure of schools to ease the movement of students with disabilities.

Item 2 of table 9 also refers to the organization of classrooms. As depicted in the table corresponding to item 2, 17.4% of respondents reported that the organization of the classrooms from the intention of meeting the needs of students with disabilities is low (4.4% very low and 13% low). Again, 35.5% of the participants also rated the organization of the classrooms for the above purpose as medium. But the majority of respondents, 47.1% (29% high and 18.1% very high) replied that the classrooms are highly organized in such a way that can meet the special needs of students with disabilities.

From the result, we can understand that the schools are found in a better position in organizing classrooms in such a way that they can address the special needs of students with disabilities.

The data corresponding to item 3 in Table 9 reveals that the schools' effort to improve the expectation of its staff towards the achievement of students with disabilities is rated as high by 37.9% (35.6% high and 2.3% very high) of the respondents. The same portion (37.9%) of the participants also rated the effort medium. But the remaining 24.1% (4.6 very low and 19.5% low) of the respondents reported that low effort has been made in this respect.

Concerning the issue under item 3, the principals have noted, during the interview, that some measures have been taken to improve the expectation of the schools community on the achievement of students with disabilities. According to their responses, measures such as:

- Inviting students with visual impairment to present their own poems during flag ceremonies,
- Posting the photographs, average scores and visions of best scorer students with disabilities in the schools notice board or presenting it in the schools' bulletin, and
- Inviting students who have better skills in drawing maps and other educational pictures on the walls of classrooms are among the major measures taken in this respect.

It was also confirmed by the data from the FGD. The FGD participants mentioned that the logic behind these measures is the schools community could have better exposure to the aforementioned achievements of students with disabilities and consequently could adjust its expectation on such individuals.

The other important concern in this study is the extent of the cooperation and support between the special needs education teachers and the regular classroom teachers. As shown in item 4 of the same table, the extent of the cooperation and support between the special needs education teachers and regular classroom teachers was rated high by 41.4% of the respondents (34.5% high and 6.9% very high). Those respondents who rated the item medium account 24.1% of the sample population. 34.5% of the participants (11.5% very low and 23% low) also judged the extent of the cooperation and support between these teachers as low.

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**Table-11: Responses Regarding the Opportunities of SWDs and Their Teacher to participate in the School's Decision Making**

No.	Items	Res pon dent s	Responses											
			1		2		0		3		4		Total	
			N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
1	SNE teachers have been provided adequate opportunities to participate in the school's decision making	SIC	7	23.3	14	46.7	2	6.7	4	13.3	3	10.0	30	100
		Trs.	15	26.3	19	33.3	3	5.3	14	24.6	6	10.5	57	100
		Total	22	25.3	33	37.9	5	5.8	18	20.7	9	10.3	87	100
2	Students with disabilities have been provided adequate opportunities to participate in the school's decision making	SIC	13	43.3	8	26.7	-	-	6	20.0	3	10.0	30	100
		Trs.	20	35.1	22	38.6	3	5.3	8	14.0	4	7.0	57	100
		Sts.	20	39.2	23	45.1	-	-	5	9.8	3	5.9	51	100
		Total	53	38.4	53	38.4	3	2.2	19	13.8	10	7.2	13	100

**Key: 1 = Strongly Disagree 2 = Disagree 0 = Undecided 3 = Agree 4 = Strongly Agree**

**SIC = School Improvement Committee**

**Trs. = Teachers**

**Sts. = Students**

The concern of item 1 in Table 11 is also the provision of opportunities for special needs education teachers to participate in the schools' decision making.

As the data portrayed in the table, significant portion of respondents, 63.2% (25.3% strongly disagree & 37.9% disagree) replied disagree for the adequacy of provision of opportunities for special needs education teachers to participate in the schools' decision making. 5.8% of the total respondents also replied undecided; but the remaining 31% of respondents (20.7% agree & 10.3% strongly agree) agreed that adequate opportunities have been provided for special needs education teachers.

The data obtained from interviewees (principals) and GFD participants indicated that special needs education teachers do not directly involved in many school decision making activities like school improvement planning. They mentioned that they have been invited to evaluate and comment on the school improvement plan only during the orientation of the plan instead of being involved from the beginning. The FGD participants reported that they do not satisfied on the opportunities provided for them. They further mentioned that there are no formal structures that legally invite them to participate in different school based organizations like school improvement committee. While explaining lack of adequate concern for special need education teachers, one of the FGD participants remarked that *Sometimes, the school's management overlooks special needs education teachers as it does to the students with special needs.* (F<sub>3</sub>, 12 April, 2010).

Concerning the opportunities of students with disabilities to participate in the school's decision making, the data from item 2 of Table 11, 76.8% of the respondents (38.4% strongly disagree & 38.4% disagree) didn't agree that students with special needs have been provided adequate opportunities to participate in the schools' decision making. 21% of them also claimed as they agree that such students have been provided adequate opportunities to participate in the school's decision making. But the response of 2.2% of respondents was undecided.

Concerning the same issue, the data from the interview with the principals indicated that the required opportunities have not been provided for these students. The interviewed principals confirmed that there are no specific formal structures that invite students with disabilities to adequately involve in the school's decision making. They all reported that except one student who has been included in SIC as a representative of students regardless of his/her special needs, no another student is a member of the committee.

**Table-12: Responses Regarding Inclusion of SNE in the School's Plan, Report and CPD**

No.	Items	Res pon dent s	Responses										Total	
			1		2		0		3		4		N	%
			N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
1	The school's plans	SIC	6	20.0	14	46.7	1	3.3	7	23.3	2	6.2	30	100
	addresses the special needs	Trs.	10	17.5	19	33.3	1	1.8	14	24.6	13	22.8	57	100
	of the students	Total	16	18.4	33	37.9	2	2.3	21	24.1	15	17.2	87	100
2	The school's reports have	SIC	4	13.3	9	3.0	-	-	12	40.0	5	16.7	30	100
	include the special needs of	Trs.	9	15.8	12	21.1	2	3.5	20	35.1	14	24.6	57	100
	the students	Total	13	14.9	21	24.2	2	2.3	32	36.8	19	21.8	87	100
3	Special needs education is	SIC	11	36.7	10	33.3	-	-	8	26.7	1	3.3	30	100
	regularly included in the	Trs.	21	36.8	24	42.1	-	-	8	14	4	7.1	57	100
	school based professional	Total	32	36.8	34	39.1	-	-	16	18.4	5	5.7	87	100
	dev't strategy													

**Key: 1 = Strongly Disagree 2 = Disagree 0 = Undecided 3 = Agree 4 = Strongly Agree**

**SIC = School Improvement Committee**

**Trs. = Teachers**

Item 1 in Table 12 also refers to the inclusion of issues of special needs education in the school's plan. As can be seen from the data for item 5, 41.4% of the respondents agree that the schools' plan adequately addresses the special needs of students. Those respondents who respond negatively (disagree) also accounts 56.3% of the total respondents. The remaining 2.3% of respondents gave neutral response (undecided).

As stated in the strategic plans and other plans of each sample school, almost all of the strategic plans of schools have incorporated several special needs education issues that are suggested by the school improvement program framework. But from the 2009/2010 annual plans of the schools, the researcher has noted that some schools have incorporated very few and general, if any, issues of special needs education in their annual plan. Almost nothing was found to be mentioned on the title of special needs education in their annual budget breakdown. Interviewed principals also mentioned that since the strategic plan is almost a direct copy of the SIP framework, the strategic plans are enriched with issues of special needs education. But it does not be true for the annual plans. It was witnessed from the respective documents.

The FGD participants and even some principals confirmed that, besides being very limited, such special needs education issues which have been indicated in the plan have not been translated in to practice. They have been left being only paper works. For instance, as confirmed by document review in one of the sample schools the "Teachers Development Program Committee" has proposed to identify and support "gifted and talented" students in its agenda. But the same issue was raised and the same strategies were suggested by the committee for four consecutive monthly meetings i.e. from October up to January.

Thus, based on the preceding discussions, we can infer that, though there is an increased tendency of including special needs education issues in their strategic plan, schools have not been adequately addressing the special needs of their student in their annual plans. Besides, they do not effectively implement what they have planned concerning students with special needs. This implies that the special needs of students are more likely to be overlooked in the school improvement process. Hence the effectiveness of the implementation of the program is more likely to be questionable.

The data in item 2 reveals that 39.1% of the respondents do not agree that the schools' reports have adequately addressed the practices of special needs education in the schools. On the other side greater portion of the respondents, (58.6%) responded positively (36.8% agree & 21.8% strongly agree). The respondents who gave neutral response (undecided) cover 2.3% of them.

Reviewed documents such as: Quality Education Audit Checklist and the monthly statistics and performance reports indicated that the schools have incorporated several issues of SNE in their report. For instance, the reports included statistics of students with special needs and SNE teachers, interventions provided for these students, modifications and accommodations of the curriculum materials to meet the special learning needs of students, etc.

The data in item 3 of Table 12 also refers to school based professional development strategies. As the data indicated in this item, the majority of respondents (75.9%) do not agree (36.8% strongly disagree & 39.1 disagree) on the adequacy of school based professional development strategies for teachers of students with special needs. But the remaining 23.1% of respondents replied positively (18.4% agree & 5.7% strongly agree).

The data obtained from interview conducted with school principals confirmed that almost all schools have no school based strategies designed to improve the professional competence of teachers of students with special needs. In line with this, one of the principals during the interview said:

*Since there is no any well trained special needs education teacher, we didn't try it so far. /R<sub>5</sub>, 13 April, 2010/*

**Table-13: Responses Regarding Supports Provided By the Schools' Management and Woreda and Zonal Education Office**

No.	Items		Responses											
			1		2		0		3		4		Total	
			N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
1	The school management provides adequate follow up and support for education of SWSNs	SIC	2	6.7	6	20.0	-	-	17	56.7	5	16.7	30	100
		Trs.	9	15.8	15	26.3	-	-	24	42.1	9	15.8	57	100
		Sts.	10	19.6	12	23.5	2	3.9	18	35.3	9	17.7	51	100
		Total	21	15.2	33	23.9	2	1.4	59	42.8	23	16.7	87	100
2	Education experts at woreda and zone level provides adequate support for the education of SWDs	SIC	9	30	12	40	3	10.0	4	13.3	2	6.7	30	100
		Trs.	18	28.1	19	33.3	2	1.8	14	28.1	4	8.8	57	100
		Total	27	31.0	31	35.6	5	5.8	18	20.7	6	6.9	87	100

**Key: 1 = Strongly Disagree 2 = Disagree 0 = Undecided 3 = Agree 4 = Strongly Agree**

**SIC = School Improvement Committee**

**Trs. = Teachers**

**Sts. = Students**

The concern of item 1 in Table 13 is the adequacy of the support that the schools' leadership and management provide for the education of students with special needs. As the data in item 1 depicts, 39.1% of respondents didn't agree on the adequacy of the support of the schools leadership and management provided for education of children with special needs. But 59.5% of respondents agreed that the support provided for these students is adequate. The remaining 1.4% of them also responded neutrally (undecided).

Interviewed principals also mentioned that the school's leadership and management assists the education of students with disabilities through provision of stationary materials, uniform, and other devices; through arranging classroom according to the special needs of students, providing financial support, building the capacity of teachers who teach students with special needs.

For instance, as the researcher witnessed from different documents, one of the sample schools has assisted 193 orphans (M=110, F=83) by providing uniform, stationary materials, and clothes. Another school also provided tape recorder and recorded radio programs of five subjects for three student (M =1, F = 2) with visual impairment. Similarly, one of the principals also mentioned that the school has developed a training manual and provided training for teachers on the basic concepts of SNE.

In item 2 of Table 13, significant portion of respondents (66.6%) do not agree that education experts at woreda and zone level have been providing adequate support for the education of students with special needs. But on the other side 27.6% of respondents replied positively (23% agree & 8.1% strongly agree); where as the remaining 5.8% of them replied undecided.

The data obtained from interviews conducted with the educational officers indicated that Gondar Town Administration Education Office and the Zonal Education Department facilitate workshop for teachers on issues of special needs education, recruit teachers for training, and provides some learning materials for students with disabilities. However, the interviewed principals and the FGD participants have noted that the support of the education offices is not satisfactory as such. They mentioned that provision of a 2 days workshop, 16 Brailles and recruiting only 2 teachers for training for a given woreda alone is not sufficient support. As to them, instead, the relationship between the

schools and the woreda education office concerning the education of students with special needs mainly focuses on exchanging reports.

#### **4.2.4 Community Involvement**

This section deals with school improvement activities with respect to the involvement of the community in general and parents/carers of children with disabilities in particular.

Respondents were asked to rate to what extent the following school improvement activities, in table 14, have been implemented in their schools. Accordingly, their response is summarized in table 14 below.

**Table 14: Parents and Community Involvement**

No.	Items	Respon dents	Responses										Total	
			1		2		3		4		5		N	%
			N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%		
1	Gathering information from parents about the special needs of students	SIC	9	30.0	11	36.7	6	20.0	4	13.3	-	-	30	100
		Tr.	15	26.3	21	36.8	12	21.1	5	8.8	4	7.0	57	100
		Sts.	20	39.2	14	27.5	9	17.6	6	11.8	2	3.9	51	100
		<b>Total</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>31.9</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>33.3</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>19.6</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>10.9</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>4.3</b>	<b>138</b>	<b>100</b>
2	Reporting the academic & behavioral change of SWDs to their parents	SIC	7	23.3	9	30.0	8	26.7	6	2.0	-	-	30	100
		Tr.	15	26.3	19	33.3	12	21.1	10	17.5	1	1.8	57	100
		Sts.	15	29.4	14	27.5	9	17.6	10	19.6	3	5.9	51	100
		<b>Total</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>26.8</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>30.4</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>21.1</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>18.8</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>2.9</b>	<b>138</b>	<b>100</b>
3	Giving opportunities for parents/carers of CWDs to participate in the school's decision making	SIC	14	46.7	7	23.3	8	26.7	1	3.3	-	-	30	100
		Tr.	23	40.4	19	33.3	10	17.5	5	8.8	-	-	57	100
		Sts.	15	29.4	13	25.5	11	21.6	7	13.7	5	9.8	51	100
		<b>Total</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>37.7</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>28.3</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>21.0</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>9.4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>3.6</b>	<b>138</b>	<b>100</b>
4	Sharing experiences among teachers and parents on how to assist their CWDs	SIC	10	33.3	9	30	8	26.7	3	10.0	-	-	30	100
		Tr.	14	24.6	24	42.1	12	21.0	7	12.3	-	-	57	100
		Sts.	17	33.3	15	29.4	10	19.6	6	11.8	3	5.9	51	100
		<b>Total</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>29.7</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>34.8</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>21.7</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>11.6</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2.2</b>	<b>138</b>	<b>100</b>
5	Establishing partnership with other organizations, institution ,sectors to support the education of CWDs	SIC	3	10.0	6	20.0	9	30.0	12	4.0	-	-	30	100
		Tr.	7	12.3	10	17.5	17	29.8	23	40.4	-	-	57	100
		<b>Total</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>11.5</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>18.4</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>29.9</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>40.2</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>87</b>	<b>100</b>

**Key: 1 = Very Low 2 = Low 3 = Medium 4 = High 5 = Very High**

**SIC = School Improvement Committee**

**Trs. = Teachers**

**Sts. = Students**

As shown in item 1 of table 14, the majority of respondents, (65.2%) reported that the school's effort to gather information from parents/carers about the special needs of their child is low. But the remaining 19.6% and 15.2% of respondents also rated the effort of the school in this respect medium and high respectively.

The data in item 2 also portray that efforts that have been made on reporting the academic and behavioral change of students with disabilities to their parents/carers and to invite them to comment on is rated as low, medium, and high by 57.2%, 21.1% and 21.7% of the total respondents respectively.

As depicted in item 3, significant portion of the total respondents (64.5%) rated the teachers' effort to share their experiences on how to assist their children with disabilities to their parents/carers as low. But the teachers' effort regarding this issue was also rated as medium and high by 21.7% and 13.8% of the respondents respectively.

The concern of item 4 in Table 14 is also the opportunities provided for parents/carers of students with disabilities to participate in the school's decision making. It is indicated that the majority of respondents (66%) reported that parents/guardians of students with disabilities have low opportunities to participate in the school's decision making. But on the other side those respondents who replied medium and high accounts 21% and 13% of the total respondents respectively.

The data gathered from interviewed principals and FGD participants indicated that schools, during flag ceremonies, inform students with disabilities to bring their parents/cares during different programs and events of the school as they do for parents/carers of other students. The schools have parents meeting day every two months. Besides, the principal and the FGD participant from the special needs education unit have reported that, parents/carers of students with visual impairment and with mental retardation have meetings every month in the school. It was supposed that parents could share their own experience about their children among each other during these programs. Special needs education teachers were also expected to give orientation to parents on what they should know about and do for their children. However, the respondents have reported that despite such arrangements (programs), it is only very few parents/guardians that attend the program regularly. Even most of the few parents who attend the programs regularly primarily come for the sake of

material benefit (i.e. to receive their children's monthly payment). They further mentioned that there is no special strategy and effort made with respect to the parents /carers of students with disabilities.

According to the respondents, such limited participation of parents/carers is attributed to negative attitude and low expectation parents hold towards their children's education, lack of concern from parents/carers, long distance of the school's location, and lack of efforts of teachers and other concerned bodies to contact parents/carers of children with disabilities. As parents of children with disabilities feel shame and guilt for having such type of children, the schools were expected to make special effort and provide support to make parents involved in their children's education and in the school's decision making.

Another most important concern in this study was the collaboration and partnership of the schools with other locally available organizations, individuals, and sectors. Regarding this, the data in item 5 of Table 14 reveals that 29.9% of respondents replied that the degree of partnership between the schools and other organizations is low. On the other side, 29.9% and 40.2% of the total respondents also responded the item as medium and high respectively.

Concerning the partnership of the schools with other organizations, interviewed principals and FGD participants mentioned that several organizations have been involved in the education of children with disabilities. They noted that CBR Gondar University, Norway Save the Children, World Learning Ethiopia, Focus on Children at Risk are among the partner organizations. These organizations have provided stationary materials & other learning materials, workshop for teachers on special needs education, physiotherapy for children with mental retardation, etc. The participants, however, mentioned that such partners of the schools most of the time provide these supports by their own initiatives and programs instead of being mobilized by the schools.

#### **4.2.5: The Status of the Schools in Implementing the School Improvement Program across the Four Domains**

Respondents were asked to weigh their school's level in implementing the SIP in relation to the four domains. And accordingly their responses are summarized below in table 15.

As the data in table 15 indicates, the majority (49.4 %, 43.7%, 55.2%, and 48.3 %) of the respondents indicated that their school is found at functioning level in implementing the SIP regarding the teaching and learning, students' learning environment, school leadership and management, and community involvement domains respectively.

The data reveals that the schools' effort so as to address the special learning needs of students across the four domains is low as compared to the standard in the policy document. The schools remain much more to do to implement the SIP to the achieving level. As depicted in the table the schools, however, have relatively better performance regarding the school leadership and management domain. This implies that the SIP has not been successfully implemented in light of the SNE.

#### **4.3. Challenges in Implementing the SIP In Relation to Special Needs Education and Suggested Solutions**

As it was indicated in review literature part of this study, several factors are likely to affect the effective implementation of the school improvement program. In line with this, respondents (school improvement committee members and teachers) were asked to indicate to what extent the following factors, (those listed in table 16), affect the implementation of the SIP especially from the view of meeting the special learning needs of students. Accordingly, the respondents provided their responses in the way that is summarized in the following table.

**Table-16: Challenges in Implementation of SIP in Relation to Special Needs Education as Perceived by Teachers and SIC.**

No.	Item	Resp o't	Responses										Total	
			0 N	%	1 N	%	2 N	%	3 N	%	4 N	%	N	%
1	Turnover or mobility of teachers and principals	SIC	15	50.0	6	20	4	13.3	3	10.0	2	6.7	30	100
		Trs.	20	35.1	19	33.3	9	15.8	5	8.8	4	7.0	57	100
		<b>Total</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>40.3</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>28.7</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>14.9</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>9.2</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>6.9</b>	<b>87</b>	<b>100</b>
2	Lack of concern and commitment of the school community for SWDs	SIC	2	6.7	6	20.0	6	20.0	15	50.0	1	3.3	30	100
		Trs.	4	7.0	10	17.5	17	29.8	23	40.4	3	5.3	57	100
		<b>Total</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>6.9</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>18.4</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>26.4</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>43.7</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>4.6</b>	<b>87</b>	<b>100</b>
3	Lack of follow up and support from woreda and zone education office	SIC	1	3.3	5	16.7	9	30.0	11	36.7	4	13.3	30	100
		Trs.	4	7.0	10	17.5	16	28.1	23	40.4	4	7.0	57	100
		<b>Total</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>5.8</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>17.2</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>28.7</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>39.1</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>9.2</b>	<b>87</b>	<b>100</b>
4	Lack of financial and material resources	SIC	2	6.7	2	6.7	7	23.3	9	30.0	10	33.3	30	100
		Trs.	2	3.5	3	5.3	12	21.1	21	36.8	19	33.3	57	100
		<b>Total</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>4.6</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>5.8</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>21.8</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>34.5</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>33.3</b>	<b>87</b>	<b>100</b>
5	Poor understanding of the schools' community on SIP	SIC	1	3.3	5	16.7	9	30	10	33.3	5	16.7	30	100
		Trs.	4	7	6	10.5	16	28.1	20	35.5	11	19.3	57	100
		<b>Total</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>5.8</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>12.6</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>28.7</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>34.5</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>18.4</b>	<b>87</b>	<b>100</b>
6	Lack of awareness of the school community on the right of CWDs to education	SIC	3	10	9	30	13	43.3	5	16.7	-	-	30	100
		Trs.	9	15.8	15	26.3	24	42.1	9	15.8	-	-	57	100
		<b>Total</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>13.8</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>27.6</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>42.5</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>16.1</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>87</b>	<b>100</b>
7	Poor school leadership and management ability	SIC	9	30	12	40	6	20	3	10	-	-	30	100
		Trs.	16	28.1	24	42.1	8	14	7	12.3	2	3.5	57	100
		<b>Total</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>28.7</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>41.4</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>16.1</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>11.5</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2.3</b>	<b>87</b>	<b>100</b>
8	Lack of cooperation and support from parents	SIC	2	6.7	5	16.7	12	40	7	23.3	4	13.3	30	100
		Trs.	4	7.0	9	15.8	28	49.1	11	19.3	5	8.8	57	100
		<b>Total</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>6.9</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>16.1</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>20.7</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>10.3</b>	<b>87</b>	<b>100</b>
9	Lack qualified special needs education teachers	SIC	2	6.7	3	10	6	20	7	23.3	12	40	30	100
		Trs.	3	5.3	3	5.3	10	17.5	22	38.6	19	33.3	57	100
		<b>Total</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>5.8</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>6.9</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>18.4</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>33.3</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>35.6</b>	<b>87</b>	<b>100</b>
10	Lack of support of partner organizations	SIC	3	10.0	7	23.3	10	33.3	5	16.7	5	16.7	30	100
		Trs.	4	7.0	11	19.3	23	40.4	10	17.5	9	15.8	57	100
		<b>Total</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>8.1</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>20.7</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>37.9</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>17.2</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>16.1</b>	<b>87</b>	<b>100</b>

**Key:** 0 = Never at All    1 = Slightly    2 = Moderately    3 = Severly    4 = Very Severly

**SIC = School Improvement Committee**

**Trs. = Teachers**

As can be seen from table 16, the data respective to item 1 indicates that the majority of 69% (60) respondents reported that teachers' turnover either don't affect (40.3%) or do affect slightly (28.7%) the effective implementation of the SIP. On the other side, 14.9% and 16.1% of the participants replied that the school staff turnover has affected the school improvement effort moderately and severely respectively. This finding agrees with the previous analysis. The data in items 1 of table 2 indicated that the great majority of respondents (80% of principals, 84.2% of teachers and 83.3% of SIC members) have at least a three years work experience in their present school. This implies that the schools' staff turnover or mobility rate is low. As the result, the school improvement process in the research area has not been affected by the factor.

In item 4 of table 16, greater portion, 70.1% (61) of respondents replied that lack of school leadership and management ability either does not affect (28.7%) or it does slightly affect (41.4%) the effectiveness of the school improvement endeavor. Those respondents who replied moderately and severely cover 16.1% and 13.8% of the total respondents respectively. The preceding discussion conveys that schools staff turnover and lack of poor school leadership and management do not remarkably affect the effective implementation of the SIP.

The data in items 6, 8 and 10 of table 16 also reveals that considerable amount of respondents (42.5% and 46%) reported that lack of awareness of the schools' community on the right of CWDs to education, and lack of cooperation and support of parents, respectively have moderately affected the successful implementation of the SIP in primary schools.

As can be observed from the data respective to items 2, 3 and 5 of the same table, remarkable portion of participants mentioned that lack of concern and commitment of the school community especially teachers of CWDs (48.3%), lack of follow up and support of wereda education office (48.3%), and poor understanding of the schools' community on SIP (52.9%) have affect the school improvement effort severely.

In addition, the data in items 4 and 9 also clearly indicates that the great majority of respondents (67.8%) and 68.9% respectively) reported that lack of financial and material resources, and qualified special needs education teachers have severely affected the school improvement process.

From the preceding discussions we can understand that despite their deference in degree of their effect, except the turnover/mobility of teachers of principals, and lack of school leadership and management ability, all the factors which are presented in table 15 are likely to affect the implementation of the SIP. However, according to the participant's response, lack of qualified special needs education teachers and financial and material resource are the most severely affecting factors of the school improvement effort. Poor understanding of the schools' community on the SIP is also the next more severely affecting factor.

The above findings are consistent with the findings discussed before in this study. For instance, we have seen in the analysis of items 1 and 2 of table 8 that the larger portion of respondent confirmed that efforts in provision of SNE teachers (62.1%) facilities and materials (76.1%) is low.

As can be referred from the analysis made for the data from item 5 of table 2, a very large portion of respondents (72.3%), except student respondents, reported that either they did not attend training on SIP or the training was not adequate.

In short, lack of provision of adequate human, material and financial resources, and poor understanding on the SIP area most likely to severely hinder endeavors towards school improvement.

In their responses to the open-ended question, the respondents have suggested the following possible solutions for the perceived problems:

- Providing pre-service and in-service training and workshop for teachers and school community on special needs education in a continual basis
- Allocating adequate resources
- Establishing increased partnership with other organizations, sectors, parents etc.
- Encouraging and reinforcing teachers who are teaching children with special needs
- Assigning special needs educators at each level of educational management to support monitor and evaluate the education of children with special needs.

# Chapter Five

## Discussion

Under this chapter, the main findings of the study are discussed and interpreted corresponding to the four domains of the SIP and in line with the reviewed literatures and the suggestions in SIP framework

### 5.1 The learning and Teaching Domain

Learners are more often unique. They have diverse needs, strengths, and abilities. Hence, to provide effective and appropriate teaching for all students, teachers must recognize and accommodate the unique learning needs and styles of individual students /Tasmania Department of Education 2002/. They need to adjust their teaching approach according to the special learning needs of students (MOE, 2007b). However, the result of this study indicated that the teaching approaches that teachers mostly use are not responsive to the special learning needs of their students. The data from most of the interviewees, FGD participants and respondents of the questionnaire revealed that students with special needs have been taught in such a way that other students have been thought. Though teachers are aware of the special learning needs of their students, they do not adjust and modify their teaching approaches in line with the students' needs. They do not provide special support for students so as to meet their special learning needs.

The finding also revealed that in most cases teachers do not adjust the assessment techniques in such a way that can meet the special learning needs of the students. And also, they do not use the assessment results as basis for improving the students' learning. As reported by many of students, in many occasions, the tests and exams include items that are not appropriate for students with special needs, especially for students with disabilities. For instance, students with visual impairment have been provided with test/exam items that refer to charts or pictures with out adequate oral descriptions. In other cases, teachers simply omit some test/exam items that are supposed to be "not appropriate" for students with disabilities instead of making the required adjustments. In addition, the finding

indicated that students with disabilities have not been provided adequate time and conducive condition and environment while they were working on exams.

The above discussion indicates that the assessment practices in the research area were not in line with what the SIP framework and literatures suggest in this respect. For instance, it is suggested that so as to make the assessment process accessible, meaningful, challenging and applicable for all learners with diverse backgrounds and needs, assessment techniques should be designed and employed in line with the students' level of development and other special learning needs (MOE, 200b). Carefully developed and properly used assessment procedures can also be used to improve students' learning and instruction (Linn and Miller, 2005).

According to the result of the study, students with special needs have also been deprived of curricular materials that are responsive to their special learning needs. The data from almost all interviewees, FGD participants, and respondents of the questionnaire revealed that primary schools in the research area do not adapt and modify the curricular materials in line with the diverse needs of students. Instead of making the required adaptations and modifications of the curricular materials, teachers in most cases either present the general education curriculum as it was developed for the regular classroom students regardless of the diverse needs of students; or omit the contents that are supposed to be "inappropriate" for students with special needs. However, it was suggested that students of diverse backgrounds, abilities or needs must experience a full and rich curriculum appropriate to their needs, interest and concern (Mitchell, 2005). To this effect, schools should evaluate and modify the curriculum in its content and delivery to determine if they are in line with the needs of students; and whether they are relevant and allows for participation (MOE, 2007b).

Generally, the preceding discussion indicates that, as compared to and judged against the suggestions in the SIP framework (MOE, 2007b) and related literatures, the school improvement effort in the research area regarding making the curricular materials, teaching approaches and assessment practices responsive to the diverse backgrounds and needs of students is not promising. The SIP has not been implemented in such ways that facilitate mainstreaming and inclusion of students with disabilities as it was suggested in the SIP framework regarding the learning and teaching domain. As

their needs have not been met, students with disabilities are likely to be subjected for low achievement, repetition; and finally dropout of school. Hence, the schools remain much more to do in making the learning and teaching domain more inclusive.

Despite the above limitations of the schools, the finding of the study revealed that teachers most of the time encourage peer support among students with disabilities and without disabilities. As reported by students, teachers usually organizer groups or pairs in such ways that establishes mutual support among students with disabilities and with out disabilities. The increased peer support among students with disabilities (SWDS) and with out disabilities is more likely to give a good opportunity for improving the achievements of SWDs, minimizing attitudinal barriers for learning and enhancing social inclusion. Supporting this idea, Ainscow (1991) in Tasmania Department of Education (2002) noted that cooperative learning helps to improve both social skills and educational outcomes for all students. Familiarizing, that is getting students with and without disabilities to mingle as coworkers, associates, and social acquaintance could serve as one of the best remedies for attitudinal barriers (UNESCO, 2003).

## **5.2 The Students' Learning Environment**

The finding of the study showed that the schools' effort made to fulfill special needs education teachers and to provide facilities and materials required for the education of students with disabilities is low. The data obtained from interviewed educational officers and reviewed documents indicated that there are only seven special needs education teachers throughout the government primary schools of Gondar town. The training provided for regular classroom teachers on special needs education and was reported as inadequate. Interviewed principals and educational officers reported that only a 2 days workshop on special needs education was provided for some selected regular classroom teachers. It was also reported that only two candidates were recruited for formal training on special needs education in the present academic year.

The preceding discussion convey that, as compared to the very large population of students with special needs in the town (470) and the expected standard indicated in the special needs education

program strategy i.e. at least two SNE teachers in each primary schools (MOE, 2007b), the efforts that have been made to fulfill SNE teachers is insignificant.

The finding also revealed that the provision of materials like Braille and Stylus-slate, Braille written materials, and other materials required for the education of children with disabilities in general and students with mental retardation in particular is limited. In line with this, the FGD participants and interviewed principals reported that only sixteen Braille and Stylus-Slate were provided by the Woreda Education office for Students with visual impairment in the current academic year; and they noted that it is insignificant as compared to its demand in the schools. The data from the FGD participants indicated that due to lack of Braille and Stylus-slate, students with visual impairment tend to be confined only to auditory information.

From the above result, we can deduce that the school improvement efforts of the primary schools with respect to ensuring the provision of adequate human and material resources for the education of students with special needs are limited. As the result, the quality of the education of children with disabilities is more likely to be affected. Supporting this idea, UNESCO (2003) noted that lack of qualified teachers, curricular and other teaching and learning materials may hamper the quality of education. Hence, it is suggested that trained teachers, and appropriate materials and facilities should be available in the schools to manage the special needs education program more effectively (MOE, 2007b). As shown in the result of the study, some buildings of the schools like classrooms, libraries and toilettes are not easily accessible for students who have difficulty in mobility. They do not have ramps. As the result, student who has difficulty in mobility, particularly students with wheelchair cannot easily enter and be served in. In addition, respondent students reported that stones and other construction materials (e.g. wood) have been stored anywhere in the school compound irresponsibly.

The evidences lead to the conclusion that due to the inaccessibility of the buildings of the schools and barriers to move in the compound, the range of the participation and learning activities of children who have difficulty in mobility is more likely to be challenged and limited. Hence, the schools should create a learning environment that could effectively meet the diverse needs of all learners so as to

orthopedic impairments. It was also indicated that the schools leadership and management support the education of students with special needs by providing stationary materials, learning materials like tape recorder and recorded radio programs, uniform, and by arranging classroom according the students' special needs. This shows that the schools are found in favor of the SNE policy that advocates inclusion which is in agreement with the direction of the national document on the special needs education program strategy (MOE, 2006).

In line with this, the SIP framework (MOE, 2007b) suggests that the schools should ensure that they have a comprehensive SNE policy which is regularly evaluated and follows recommendations in SNE program strategy; and it should also be communicated and shared by the whole school community. However, the majority of respondents reported that the school community has no adequate understanding on SNE and special needs education program strategy. Similarly, the data from interviewed principals and educational officers indicated that all the schools and Woreda Education Office and Zonal Education Department have no the special needs education program strategy document. In addition, as reported by principals and FGD participants, no orientation (workshop) was provided for the school community on the strategy. This implies that the schools' community, especially the schools leadership and management including the SIC could not be effective in implementing the SIP in line with special needs education strategy. The data from interviewed principal and reviewed documents also indicated that most of the schools do not regularly and adequately include SNE issues in teachers' continuous professional development strategies, annual plans and in the schools' annual budget break down.

Based on the preceding discussions, one can infer that teachers are more likely to lack adequate knowledge and skills required for teaching students with special needs; and consequently, they may be against the inclusion of students with disabilities in the regular classroom. Supporting this idea, Labosco and Newman (1992) have noted in Waligore (2002) that teachers' lack of knowledge and skills due to lack of training may be demonstrated in negative attitudes and lack of confidence to teach students with disabilities.

In addition, since schools do not include SNE issues in their annual plans and implement it accordingly, the special learning needs of the students are more likely to be overlooked and as the result the schools may not provide adequate support for the education of students with special needs. This shows that the schools have not been implementing the SIP in line with what was suggested by its framework (MOE, 2007b) in this respect.

The finding of the study also indicated that special needs education teachers and students with special needs have not been provided adequate opportunities to directly involve in the schools' decision making. Interviewed principals indicated that students with special needs have not been represented in the SIC. They noted that only one representative of students has been included in the committee regardless of his/her disability. No a student with a disability was found to be a member of the school improvement committee. This conveys that the schools' leadership and management is not participatory in this respect.

According to the data obtained from interviewed principals and FGD participants, the support of Woreda education office and zonal education department to the education of students with special needs is inadequate. Interviewed principals reported that their relationship mainly focuses on exchange of reports. From this it seems possible to conclude that due to the absence of adequate support and pressure from higher level educational management, the schools' commitment to support the education of students with special needs is more likely to decline.

#### **5.4 Community Involvement**

Parents are among the most valued assets of the schools to maximize their children's education achievement (Joseph, 2007). Their involvement in their children's education and in the schools' decision making could result in increased achievement of students (Lowell, 1991; cited in Teferi, 2007). However, the findings of this study indicated that the schools effort in gathering information from parents about the special needs of their children, reporting the academic and behavioral change of children to their parents/carers, and sharing experiences on how to assist their children with

disabilities to parents/carers is low. This conveys that the schools effort in involving parents/carers in the schools' decision making and in their children's education is not adequate. The schools therefore need to do much more in this respect.

On the other side, the result of the study indicated that several NGOs in the research area have been involved in providing stationary and other learning materials for student with disabilities, workshops on SNE and other professional support for teachers. The schools have established encouraging partnership and collaboration with NGOs so as to support the education of students with special needs. In line with the need for collaboration, Ainscow (195) cited in UNESCO (2003) noted that the involvement of parents and other members of the community is essential to provide quality education for students with special needs.

### **5.5 Challenges in Implementing the SIP in Relation to SNE**

As indicated in the reviewed literature, many factors are likely to affect the effectiveness of the implementation of the SIP. In line with this, the result of this study revealed that lack of qualified special needs education teachers, curricular and other learning materials, financial resources, and poor understanding of the schools' community on the SIP is the most severely affecting factors of school improvement endeavors in relations to meeting the special needs of students. So that they could affect the quality of education of students with special needs.

### **5.6 Limitations and Significance of the Study**

The following limitations were encountered in course of this study.

- ❖ Lack of sing language skill in the researcher to give orientation to respondent students with hearing impairments (deafness) regarding the study while gathering data.
- ❖ Students with mental retardation were not included in the sampled respondents due to their limitations to understand the issues under the study. As the result, their experiences in the schools are not included in this study.

- ❖ Lack of adequate literatures regarding the link between school improvement and special needs education.
- ❖ As being a beginner researcher, the researcher was also lack of adequate experiences in the study.
- ❖ Due to time and economic constraints, concerned bodies from Amhara National State Education Bureau are not included in this study.

Despite the aforementioned limitations, the findings of the study may have the following significances:

- This study reveals the gap between the theoretical framework (the policy) of the SIP and the actual practice of schools' regarding addressing the needs of children with the special educational needs while implementing the SIP.
- The study also informs concerned bodies (e.g. schools' leadership and other educational management bodies) those challenges that have hindered the effectiveness of the implementation of SIP in relation to SNE and the possible measures.
- Finally, the study can also serve as a ground for others to conduct detailed investigation on the area.

## Chapter Six

### Summary, Conclusion and Recommendation

In this chapter, the course of the study and major findings are summarized, conclusions are developed based on the findings, and finally recommendations to the identified limitations of the school improvement process are suggested.

#### 6.1 Summary

This study was conducted on government primary schools of Gondar town. The main purpose of this study was to investigate the main practices and challenges of primary schools in implementing the school improvement program in light of meeting the special learning needs of students.

To this end the following basic questions of the study were formulated:

- Does the SIP have been planned and implemented as intended in its framework in relation to special needs education.
- What major activities have been undertaken in the process of implementing the SIP regarding addressing the special needs of students?
- What challenges do schools encountered in the course of implementing the SIP in relation to meeting the special learning needs of students?

In course of searching for answers for the preceding leading questions of the study, literatures related to the issues under the study were reviewed.

In this study, descriptive survey approach was used. And both quantitative and qualitative data were also employed. Such data gathering instruments as questionnaires, interview, FGD, and document review were used to obtain the required data. The questionnaire includes both open-ended and close-ended items. Interview and FGD guides were employed to manage the data gathering procedure. The subjects of the study were 2 educational officers, 5 school principals, 30 school improvement committee members, 57 teachers and 51 students with special needs. In the analysis of data, the researcher used frequency counts and percentile. The qualitative data was also analyzed qualitatively

with narrations and thick descriptions; and it was used to supplement and triangulate the quantitative data. From the analysis, the following major findings were obtained:

- Most of the populations of students with disabilities are students with visual impairment. And accordingly, the greatest portion of student respondents was students with visual impairment.
- More than 90% of school principals, teachers, and the school improvement committee members have no attended adequate training on special needs education.
- The great majority of respondents (except all students) (89.4%) of teachers, SIC, and principals have attended training/workshop on SIP; however, most of them (69.1%) reported that the training is not adequate. Despite the inadequacy of the training, they have involved in planning the school improvement plan.
- The special needs of most students have been identified and recorded by the school. However the schools emphasized on visible disabilities.
- Most teachers in the research area are aware of the special learning needs of most of their students and do accept the consequent difference in their learning rate. However, most of them do not usually adjust their teaching and assessment techniques to the special learning needs of the students. And it has been attributed to feeling of in competency, lack of resources and large class size.
- Teachers, most of the time, encourage peer support among students with and without disabilities.
- In most cases teachers do not adapt and modify curriculum & teaching materials and contents, activities, and exercises of the lesson in line with the special needs of students.
- The efforts made to enable special needs education teachers, students with special needs and their parents to participate in the school's decision making is low.
- Most of the schools do not adequately include the special needs of students in their annual plan but they do so in the strategic plan and in their reports. In addition, the tendency of schools to implement their plan in the light of SNE is low.
- Most of the schools' leadership and management supports the education of learners with disabilities and advocates inclusion. However, the support is not planned and well organized.
- The support of woreda education office and zone education department to the education of students with special needs is not adequate.

- The schools' effort in encouraging parents/guardians of students with disabilities to participate in their children's education is low.
- Most of schools have established partnership with several NGOs to support the education of students with disabilities. However it was found that this partnership is established mainly by the initiatives of the NGOs.
- The provision of adequate facilities and materials for the education of learners with special needs is low.
- The physical environment of most of the schools is not easily accessible for students with disabilities; however, the organization of their classrooms is responsive to the special needs of the students.
- The collaboration and support between the special needs education teachers and the regular classroom teachers is somewhat good, especially at Tsadique Yohannis Primary School.
- The status of primary schools under the study, in implementing the SIP in relation to addressing the special learning needs of students across all domains are found at functional level.
- The effective implementation of SIP in the light of meeting the special needs of learners has been mainly affected by factors such as: lack of qualified special needs education teachers, financial and material resources, poor understanding of the schools' community on SIP, low follow up and support of woreda education office and zone education department. It has also been affected by lack of concern and commitment of the schools' community for learners with special needs and poor cooperation and support of parents and partner organizations.

## 6.2 Conclusion

Through increased peer support among students with disabilities and without disabilities and improved awareness of the schools' community towards the achievement of students with disabilities, the schools in the research area are likely to combat social discrimination and solve attitudinal learning barriers of students with disabilities. They have been facilitating the integration of students with disabilities in this respect. The provision of resources and professional support for the schools by partner organizations and the shared expertise among special needs education teachers and regular classroom teachers are likely to facilitate the provision of quality education for students with special

needs. However, the collaboration between the schools and partner organizations has not been led by the schools' plans and it is, therefore fragmented.

On the other side, the provision of quality education for all, especially for the students with special needs has been hampered by lack of the necessary materials and facilitates and absence of the required adaptations and accommodations of curricular materials and the teaching-learning process. The schools have not been effectively meeting the special learning needs of students due to lack of provision of adequate training for the schools' community on special needs education. In addition, due to limited support and follow up of the education officials at woreda and zone level to the schools and due to failing to include special needs education issues in the schools' annual plan, the schools' community might not be concerned for and committed to the quality of education of students with special needs.

Further more, the schools have not been adequately incorporating the inputs and needs of students with special needs and their teachers and parents in the school improvement efforts as such parties have not been adequately involved in the school decision making. As the result, the schools are likely to miss the benefit that they need to gain from and provide for such major stakeholders of the schools.

The inaccessibility of the schools' physical environment could also discourage students with disabilities, especially students who have difficulty in mobility, to attend school and limit the range of their participation and types of learning activities that they need to involve in. As the result, they could be subjected to low achievement and dropout.

In short, in many respects, the school improvement program in the research area has not been implemented in line with the school improvement program framework in relation to special needs education. As the result, the schools have not been found in a condition that they can effectively meet the special learning needs of students.

### 6.3 Recommendations

Considering the preceding findings and conclusions, the researcher of this study would like to forward the following recommendations.

- The national document of SNE program strategy should be distributed to educational officers, schools and teachers; and increased orientation on the strategy and the SIP should be given for all individuals who have been involved in teaching and managing education so as to improve their capacity to implement and manage the SIP in light of SNE. In addition, the number of candidates recruited for the pre-service training in SNE department should be reasonably increased.
- Teachers' professional development strategies should include and give emphasis to how to adapt and modify curriculum material, learning activities, teaching approaches, and assessment techniques in line with the special learning needs of students. To this effect, related guides should be developed and provided for schools.
- The cooperation and support among students with disabilities and without disabilities should be further strengthened as it could be a means for combating discriminatory attitudes and for improving students' learning. However, it should not be to the extent that leads to increased dependency.
- Schools should design further strategies and lines through which they ensure that students with special needs, and their teachers and parents have been fully involved in the schools' decision making and other school activities. To this end, representatives of these parties should be included in the school improvement committee.
- The special learning needs of students should be further assessed by involving professionals and should be considered in all aspects of the school improvement plans. Greater attention should also be given for effective implementation of the plans.
- ✓ • To ensure that schools have been provided adequate technical professional, material and financial support and pressure, special needs education professionals should be assigned at woreda and zone level in the position that regards to the education of children with special needs. In addition, such authorized persons should provide unreserved support in a planned manner.
- In order to ensure that the physical environment of the school is easily accessible for all

learners, schools should make their compound free from obstacles to move across and establish simple ramps for inaccessible rooms from cost effective materials (like stone, mud, & wood). Besides, students with disabilities should be considered while constructing new buildings in the schools.

- Adequate budget should be allocated and utilized accordingly at different levels to fulfill the facilities and materials required for the education of children with special needs. Furthermore, the development and publications of curricular materials at the central level should consider students with disabilities.
- The collaboration and partnership between special needs education teachers and regular classroom teachers, and the schools and other organizations, sectors, institutions etc should be further strengthened in a planned and organized manner as it could minimize financial, material and human resource constraints.
- Teachers' effort to contact with parents/carers of learner with disabilities and to make them more involved in their children's education should be further strengthened.
- Best practices of the schools, regarding the education of students with special needs should be organized and shared to all schools and teachers to enhance teachers' professional development.
- Finally, the researcher would like to recommend that further researches need to be conducted on the practice of implementing SIP in light of meeting the special learning needs of students to come-up with wide scale and more detailed investigations.

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# Appendices

Addis Ababa University

School of Graduate Studies

College of Education

Department of Special Needs Education

## Appendix-A

### A Questionnaire for Teachers and School Improvement Committee Members

#### General Direction:

Dear Respondents! School improvement program (SIP) has been implemented in government schools of Gondar Town since 2006. Therefore, the purpose of this questionnaire is to gather information about the status of the implementation of the school improvement program (SIP) at primary schools of the town in relation to meeting the special learning needs of students.

The information that you will provide will determine the quality of the study. So you are kindly requested to fill the questionnaire genuinely and honestly.

The confidentiality of your response will be strictly held as the data will be used only for academic purpose. The questionnaire has two components: the first is about your general background information where as the second is about the implementation of the program (SIP).

#### Dear respondents! Please note that:

- You do not need to write your name on the questionnaire.
- You need to respond all of the items.
- You should not consult other respondents to fill it.
- Put a tick (✓) mark inside the box provided or write briefly your responses as needed.

**Thank you in advance for your cooperation!**

#### Part I: respondents' personal data

1.1. The school's name in which you are working now: \_\_\_\_\_

1.2. Sex: Male  Female

1.3. Educational level: Certificate  Diploma   
First degree  Second degree

1.4. Training you attended on special needs education:

for more than a year  for a year  not attended at all   
short term workshops less than a year  (mention it specifically below)

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1.5. Your work experience ( in years): \_\_\_\_\_

1.6. How long you stayed in this school: \_\_\_\_\_

1.7. Have you attended workshop (training) on school improvement program?

Yes  No

1.8. Have you participated in planning the SIP?

Yes  No

### Part-II General Information Regarding the Implementation of SIP.

#### 2.1. Implementation of SIP regarding the **learning and teaching domain**

How often the following school improvement activities have been carried out in your school? Give your response by marking “√” in the box provided corresponding to each activity. Choose among the following rates:

**0 = Never at All 1= Rarely 2 = Sometimes 3 = Always 4 = Very Often**



No	Activities	Responses				
		0	1	2	3	4
1	Students' special needs have been identified and recorded					
2	Teachers recognize the special needs of their students and accept that students learn at different rate.					
3	Teachers use a variety of teaching approaches that can meet the learning needs of students with special needs.					
4	Teachers encourage students with special needs to actively participate in the lessons.					
5	Teachers use assessment methods that are suitable for assessing the achievement level (progress) of students with special needs.					
6	Teachers use the assessment results as the basis for resolving the learning problems of their students with special needs.					
7	The school adapts and modifies the curriculum materials in line with the special needs of students					
8	Teachers adapt contents of lessons, activities, and exercises (like class works, homework, field works) according to the special needs of their students.					



No	Activities	0	1	2	3	4
9	Students with special needs have been encouraged to participate in school clubs and other co-curricular activities.					
10	Teachers design strategies through which students with disabilities can be supported by their peers.					
11	Teachers give extra time and support for student with disabilities to enable them to accomplish academic tasks successfully.					
12	Students have been treated equally regardless of their disabilities and other differences.					

13. Have you any more to say about the implementation of the SIP in relation to learning & teaching process in your school?

14. What limitation have you perceived regarding the teaching and learning process of students with special needs?

15. At what level do you weigh your school's performance in implementing the SIP in relation to the learning and teaching domain?

Aspiring       Developing       Functioning       Achieving

## 2.2. Implementation of SIP Regarding the Students' Learning Environment

Dear respondent! Please rate to what extent the following school improvement activities have been implemented by the school in which you are working or assigned to.

Mark "√" in the box corresponding to each item to indicate your response among the following rates:

VH = Very High      H = High

M = Medium      L = Low      VL = Very Low

No	Activities	Responses				
		VH	H	M	L	VL
1	Efforts to that have been made to fulfill special needs education (SNE) teachers					
2	Provision of facilities and materials required for the education of SWDs (like Braille, tape recorder, bold print material )					
3	Provision of challenging works and enrichment programs for gifted and talented students to develop their potential					
4	Making the physical environment (buildings ) of the school easily accessible to SWDs*					
5	Organizing classrooms in such ways that can meet the special needs of students with disabilities					
6	Improving the expectation of the school community towards the achievement of SWDs					
7	Cooperation b/n the special needs education teachers and the regular classroom teachers					

8. If you have any more to say about the schools' performance regarding establishing conducive learning environment for student with special needs, please describe it in the space provided.

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9. What other unfavorable conditions you have observed in relation to the students learning environment?

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10. At what level do you weigh your school's current performance in implementing the SIP in relation to the students learning environment domain?

Aspiring     Developing     Functioning     Achieving

### 2.3. Implementation of SIP Regarding the School Leadership and Management Domain

Please rate the level of your agreement on the adequately accomplishment of the following school improvement activities by marking “√” in the box corresponding to each item to indicate your response among the following rates:

**SD = Strongly Disagree    D = Disagree    UD = Undecided    A = Agree    SA = Strongly Agree**

No	Activities	Responses				
		SD	D	UD	A	SA
1	The school follows special needs policy that advocates inclusion					
2	Adequate efforts have been made to develop the awareness of the school community on SNE and its strategy					
3	SNE teachers have been provided adequate opportunities to participate in the school's decision making					
4	Students with disabilities have been provided adequate opportunities to participate in the school's decision making					
5	The school's plans adequately addresses the special learning needs of the students					
6	The school's reports address the practices & progress of the special needs education					
7	The school management provides adequate follow up and support for education of students with special needs					
8	education experts at woreda and zone level provides adequate support for the education of students with special needs					
9	Special needs education is regularly included in the school based professional development strategy					

10. Please mention it if you have any additional information about the performance of your school's leadership and management in relation to the education of students with special needs.

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11. At what level do you weigh your school's current performance of implementing the SIP regarding the school **leadership and management domain**?

Aspiring     Developing     Functioning     Achieving

## 2.4. Implementation of the SIP in Relation to Community Involvement

**Instruction:** Please rate to what extent the following school improvement activities have been implemented by the school in which you are working or assigned to. Please use a “√” mark in the box corresponding to each item to indicate your response among the following rates:

VH = Very High      H = High      M = Medium  
L = Low      VL = Very Low

No	Activities	Responses				
		VH	H	M	L	VL
1	Increasing the awareness of the school community, parents and the society on disability; and advocating the rights of students with disabilities to education for them.					
2	Encouraging parents/carers of students with disabilities to participate in different school programs like the school's opening and closing day, school's parent day, etc.					
3	Gathering information from parents/carers about the special needs of their children					
4	Reporting the behavioral change and achievement of students with disabilities to their parents/careers					
5	Sharing experiences on how to assist children with disabilities among teachers and parents/carers					
6	Designing strategies through which parents of children with disabilities can share each other their experiences on how to handle and support for their child.					
7	Encouraging parents/cares of children with disability to participate in the schools decision making like planning, implementing, and evaluating the school improvement program					
8	Establishing partnership with other locally available organizations (like CBR and other NGOs, universities, colleges, hospitals, and other sectors) to support the education of students with disabilities					

9. Do you have any more to say about the performance of your school in implementing the SIP in relation to the community involvement? Please write it on the space provided below.

---

10. At what level do you weigh your school's current performance of implementing the SIP in relation to the community involvement domain?

Aspiring       Developing       Functioning       Achieving

**2.5. Challenges to Implement the School Improvement Program Effectively**

To what extent do the following factors hinder the effective implementation of the school improvement program in relation to meeting the special needs of students? Please give your response by marking “√” in the box provided corresponding to each factor among the following rates:

**0 = Not At All      1 = Very Slightly      2 = Moderately**  
**3 = Severely      4 = Very Severely**

No	Factors	Responses				
		0	1	2	3	4
1	Turnover or mobility of teachers and principals					
2	Lack of concern and commitment of the school community for SWDs					
3	Lack of follow up and support from woreda and zone education office					
4	Lack of financial and material resources					
5	Poor understanding of the schools’ community on SIP					
6	Lack of awareness of the school community on the right of CWDs to education					
7	Poor school leadership and management ability					
8	Lack of cooperation and support from parents					
9	Lack qualified special needs education teachers					
10	Lack of support of partner organizations					

14. If you have any more to say about the factors that hinder the effective implementation of the SIP, please describe it as briefly as possible in the space provided.

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15. What solutions do you recommend to avoid such barriers?

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**Appendix- B**  
**Addis Ababa University**  
**School of Graduate Studies**  
**College of Education**

**Department of Special Needs Education**

**A Questionnaire for Students**

**General Direction: Dear Respondents!** The purpose of this questionnaire is to gather information about the status of the implementation of the school improvement program (SIP) in relation to special needs education at elementary schools in the town.

The information that you will provide will determine the quality of the study. So you are kindly requested to fill the questionnaire genuinely and honestly.

The confidentiality of your response will be strictly held as the data will be used only for academic purpose. The questionnaire has two components: the first is about your general background information where as the second is about the implementation of the program (SIP).

**Dear respondents! Please note that:**

- You do not need to write your name on the questionnaire.
- You need to respond all of the items.
- You should not consult other respondents to fill it.
- Put a tick (✓) mark inside the box provided or write briefly your responses as needed.

**Thank you in advance for your cooperation!**

**Part I: Respondents' Personal Data**

School: \_\_\_\_\_

Sex: male  female

Age: \_\_\_\_\_

Grade & section: \_\_\_\_\_

Personal category

- Hearing impairment
- Visual impairment
- Orthopedic impairment
- Other (specify) \_\_\_\_\_

How often the following school improvement activities have been carried out in your school?  
 Give your response by marking “√” in the box provided corresponding to each activity. Choose among the following rates:

**0 = Never at all**

**1 = Very Rarely**

**2 = Sometimes**

**3 = Often**

**4 = Very Often**

No	Activities	Responses				
		0	1	2	3	4
1	Teachers recognize the special needs of their students and accept that students learn at different rate					
2	Teachers use teaching methods that is suitable for students with disabilities					
3	Teachers encourage students with special needs to actively participate in the lessons					
4	Teachers use assessment methods that are appropriate for student with disabilities					
5	Teachers use the assessment results as the basis for resolving the learning problems of their students with special needs					
6	Teachers provide extra time and special support for student with special needs to enable them accomplish academic tasks successfully. (like class work, home work, field work etc)					
7	Teachers modify contents, activities and exercises according to the special needs of students					
8	Students with special needs have been encouraged to participate in different clubs and other co curricular activities					
9	Teachers design strategies through which students with special needs can be supported by their peers during the lesson					
10	Students with special needs are encouraged to participate in the school's decision making					
11	Provision of adapted leaning materials, devices, and facilities like Braille, tape recorder, bold print materials furnitures, etc) required for the education as well as well being of student with disabilities					
12	Provision of challenging works & enrichment programs for gifted and talented students to develop their potential					
13	Making the physical environment (buildings and the compound) of the school conducive (accessible) for learning and well being of students with disabilities					
14	Organizing the classrooms in such a way that can meet the special needs of students with disabilities					
15	Treating students equally regardless of their disabilities and other difference					

Dear respondent! Please rate the following activities by judging to what extent each of them has been carried out in your school.

Please give your response by marking “√” in the box provided corresponding to each factor among the following rates:

1 = Very Low      2 = Low      3 = Medium  
 4 = High      5 = Very High

No	Activities	Responses				
		1	2	3	4	5
16	Gathering information from parents/carers about the special needs of their children					
17	Reporting the behavioral change and achievement of students with disabilities to their parents/ carers and enviting them to comment on					
18	Sharing of experiences among teachers and parents/carers on how to assist their children with disabilities					
19	Encouraging parents/careers of students with special needs to participate in the school's decision making like planning implementing and evaluating the school improvement plan and other school programs					
20	The school leadership and management adequately supports the education of students with special needs/disabilities					

**Thank You again for Your Cooperation!**

**Appendix-C**  
**Addis Ababa University**  
**School of Graduate Studies**  
**College of Education**  
**Department of Special Needs Education**

**An Interview Guide for School Principals**

First of all I would like to thank you for consenting to spend your time to discuss with me on the implementation of the school improvement program (SIP) in your school.

The purpose of this interview is to collect data about the implementation of the SIP especially in relation to meeting the special learning needs of students.

The researcher would like to assure that the information that you would provide will be kept confidentially and will not be personalized as the data is to be used only for the above stated academic purpose. So you are requested to be genuine and honest in giving the actual information.

Then, I would like to inform you that the four domains of the school improvement process: learning and teaching, students' learning environment, school leadership and management, and community involvement are the central themes of our discussion.

May we proceed to the interview?

1. How long have you been serving this school as its principal?
2. Could you tell me your qualification, work experience, and training that you have attended on special needs education and SIP?
3. How do you explain the start of SIP in this school?
4. Does the school have and follow the special needs education program strategy? ✓
5. Could you explain any effort made to develop the awareness of the school improvement committee on disability, the right of children with disabilities to education and the national special needs education strategy?

6. How has the school modified the curriculum and learning materials both in content and delivery to include the diverse students' needs?
7. What efforts have been used to make the physical and social environment of the school and the classrooms inclusive and welcoming?
8. Could you explain the school's teachers, professional development strategy in relation to special needs education?
9. How do you explain the partnership and collaboration strategies being used with students, parents, school staff, and community so as to assure the provision of quality education for students with special needs?
10. Could you brief me on the support of/from higher educational officers in facilitating the education of children with special needs?
11. What major challenges have you perceived in your school in implementing the SIP regarding meeting the special learning needs of students? Regarding
  - developing a supportive and inclusive learning environment,
  - making the teaching-learning process responsive to the diverse students' needs,
  - developing an inclusive leadership and management in the school,
  - Establishing partnership, and collaboration with students, parents, school staff and the community?
12. Have you any more to add?

If you don't have any more, I would like to thank you again for your explanation!

## Appendix-D

**Addis Ababa University**  
**School of Graduate Studies**  
**College of Education**  
**Department of Special Needs Education**

### An Interview Guide for Woreda and Zonal Educational Officers

#### Introduction:

**Dear interviewee!** The purpose of this interview is to collect data about the implementation of the SIP especially in relation to meeting the special learning needs of students. The type of the information that you will provide will determine the quality of the research. And please be sure that the information that you will forward will be used only for the aforementioned academic purpose. You are, therefore kindly requested to be genuine and honest in providing the appropriate information in the course of the interview.

**Thank you in advance for your cooperation!**

Interview guide questions

#### I. Background Information

- Name \_\_\_\_\_, sex \_\_\_\_\_
- Qualification \_\_\_\_\_, work experience \_\_\_\_\_
- Current position \_\_\_\_\_

#### II. Implementation of the SIP and Perceived Challenges

1. Could you explain how the SIP was started in primary schools of Gondar Town?
2. Do you have any information on the implementation of the SIP in the town? If so what does it look like?
3. How does your office (department) monitor the implementation of the SIP?
4. Have you any information about the national SNE program strategy? If so, could you brief me how the SNE strategy has been integrated with SIP?
5. What administrative supports have been provided for schools to facilitate the education of students with special learning needs?
6. What challenges have you perceived in the implementation of the SIP especially from the view of meeting the special educational needs of students?
7. What remedies were taken, and what do you recommend for the future?
8. Do you have any more to say about the implementation and challenges of the SIP, especially so as to meet the special educational needs of students?

If not, I thank you again!

**Appendix-E**  
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**A Focus Group Discussion Guide for Teachers of Students with Special Needs**

**Introduction:**

The purpose of this group discussion is to gather information about the implementation challenges of the SIP in primary schools. The discussion will focus on the implementation of the program in primary schools, especially in order to meet the special learning needs of students and on perceived challenges.

The researcher would like to kindly request each member of the discussion to reflect what he/she has observed and perceived regarding the following themes in his/her respective schools.

The guiding questions for the discussion are the following:

1. How do you describe the involvement of the following stakeholders in the school improvement planning and implementing process?
  - Special education teachers
  - Students with special educational needs
  - Parents/carers of children with disabilities
2. How do you mention the support of the school leadership & management and educational officers at woreda and zonal level in facilitating the education of students with special needs?
3. How do you explain the involvement of the following stakeholders in the education of children with special needs?
  - Parents/guardians of students with disabilities
  - Other governmental sectors
  - Non governmental organizations
  - Other members of the society

4. Could you describe the efforts that have been made to create conducive learning environment (physical and social environment of the school & classrooms) for students with special needs?
5. How do you mention the efforts made to make the following components of teaching and learning process responsive to the students' diverse needs?
  - Teaching practices
  - Assessment
  - curriculum
6. What challenges have you perceived regarding the education of children with special educational needs?
7. Now you can mention it if you have any more to add?

If not, I would like to thank all of you for spending your time and sharing your schools' experience on the implementation of the SIP!