

Assessing Progress Towards Inclusive Education in India: Access and Participation of Children with Special Educational Needs

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Abstract: As of now, few studies have assessed the impact of implementing inclusive education on the achievement of students with disabilities. As of this time, however, there is little evidence that demonstrates that inclusive education improves student outcomes. This chapter reviews the literature on the effects of inclusive education for students with disabilities to provide a framework for future research. There is no empirical evidence that demonstrates a relationship between inclusive education and improved academic or social outcomes for students with disabilities. Although many states in the United States have implemented inclusive education models in their public school systems, few studies have compared their effectiveness. Many researchers have studied the effect of inclusive education on students with disabilities. However, few have examined the comparative effects of different inclusive education models used in the U.S. While there is no empirical evidence supporting the claim that inclusive education improves student outcomes, there is a substantial body of literature discussing the benefits of providing inclusive education to students with disabilities. While inclusive education does offer many potential benefits to students with disabilities, there is currently no empirical evidence that proves it increases the achievement of students with disabilities.

Many researchers argue that the primary goal of inclusive education is to provide students with disabilities an opportunity to participate in the general education curriculum. Although many researchers believe that inclusive education should be designed to meet the individual needs of each student with a disability, few studies have demonstrated that it can achieve its intended goals. Since inclusive education has become increasingly popular over the last 20 years, many researchers have argued that it has the potential to affect the lives of students with disabilities positively. While many researchers agree that inclusive education has the potential to improve the lives of students with disabilities, there is currently no empirical evidence that supports this claim.

Despite growing interest in inclusive education, the current literature base provides little empirical evidence of its effectiveness. Since there is limited research that has

systematically evaluated the effects of inclusive education on students with disabilities, further research is needed to determine whether it is an effective way to promote their academic and social development.

Index Terms: Inclusive Education; Children with Special Educational Needs; Educational Access; Participation and Retention; UDISE+ Data; School Education in India; Educational Equity; Disability and Education Policy.

I. INTRODUCTION

The inclusion of students with diverse abilities in regular education settings has become an increasingly prominent issue in education policy and research. The belief that all students can learn together in the same classroom is the cornerstone of inclusive education; students with various physical, emotional, and socio-economic challenges are entitled to the same quality education as all other students. Access to education is especially important for Children with Special Educational Needs, as it enables them to develop economically, socially, and personally.

Children with Special Educational Needs are some of the most marginalised populations in educational systems around the world. According to recent global estimates, there are over 240 million children who live with a disability, and many of those children encounter barriers when trying to obtain an education (UNICEF, 2021). Some examples of common barriers Children with Special Educational Needs encounter include inaccessible school facilities, a lack of trained educators to provide special education services, inadequate assistive technology, and social stigma associated with having a disability.

Researchers have emphasised the role of international policies and agreements in promoting inclusive education. The Salamanca Statement (1994) and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG-4) emphasise the need to establish education systems that provide equal access to education for all students.

India has implemented several policy initiatives designed to promote inclusive education. The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act (2009) and the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act (2016) both recognise the right of students with disabilities to attend school without discrimination. The National Education Policy (2020) also emphasises creating inclusive classrooms, providing flexible curriculum options, and preparing teachers to meet the varied learning needs of students.

However, despite the emphasis on inclusive education at the policy level, the participation rates of students with disabilities in the education system in India vary widely. Many schools still lack adequate resources (infrastructure, trained staff, etc.) to implement inclusive education programs effectively. It is essential to identify patterns of access and participation to strengthen inclusive education policies and practices.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The global literature on inclusive education is substantial, as is the body of evidence from international educational research. Initial discussions focused primarily on integrating Children with Special Educational Needs into regular educational settings. More recently, there has been an emphasis on systemic reform at a much broader level necessary to establish inclusive learning environments.

Ainscow and Miles (2008) assert that inclusive education necessitates a transformative approach to educational systems to enable them to embrace learner diversity. The authors emphasise that inclusive education is not merely about placing students with disabilities in regular classrooms; it also involves developing inclusive school cultures, policies, and practices to support diverse learning needs.

Booth and Ainscow (2011) established the well-known Index for Inclusion as a tool for assessing inclusive school environments across three dimensions – inclusive cultures, inclusive policies, and inclusive practices.

Research conducted by Alur (2010), focusing specifically on the Indian context, demonstrated that both social attitudes and institutional barriers continue to impact access to education for Children with Special Educational Needs. She emphasised that inclusive education necessitates both policy reform and broader societal change.

Singal (2016) examined the implementation of inclusive education policy in India and concluded that while the policy frameworks are supportive of inclusive education, teachers' classroom practices are frequently constrained by limited teacher training and institutional resources.

More contemporary research has highlighted the significance of teacher preparation and school facilities in influencing inclusive education outcomes. Sharma and Deppeler (2005) asserted that teacher attitudes towards disability play a significant role, as do inclusive classroom practices. Likewise, Forlin (2010) contended that teacher education programs should be developed to include inclusive pedagogical strategies.

An analysis of national educational data compiled by Mehta (2020) revealed that while enrollment of Children with Special Educational Needs has grown over time, they remain underrepresented within the total student population.

Additional international research has similarly underscored that inclusive education requires comprehensive, coordinated policy responses addressing infrastructure, teacher preparation, flexible curricula, and community awareness (World Bank, 2019; UNESCO, 2020).

III. RESEARCH GAP

Although there is considerable research on inclusive education, most of it concerns policy or conceptual aspects of inclusion. Relatively few studies have used national educational database systems to analyse the participation of Children with Special Educational Needs.

While large-scale educational databases like the Unified District Information System for Education Plus (UDISE+) offer rich information about enrollment patterns, the condition of

school buildings and other institutional characteristics, little empirical work has systematically examined the relationship between these datasets and inclusive education.

Additionally, very few studies have connected national statistical findings on disability and education with broader global conversations on disability and education. Therefore, in addition to addressing a critical knowledge gap, this chapter will be analysing the participation of Children with Special Educational Needs in India's schools, utilising UDISE data along with international reports and policy documents.

IV. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This chapter is framed through a dual theoretical lens that elucidates the interrelation between disability, the social structures influencing that relationship, and educational participation: the Social Model of Disability and the Capability Approach. As foundational theories for conceptualising how structural, institutional, and social factors create barriers for Children with Special Educational Needs in accessing education, these frameworks will provide a lens through which we can conceptualise how and why such factors influence children's access to education.

4.1 Social Model of Disability

Social Models The concept of Disability represents a fundamental shift in thinking about disability compared to earlier medical models of disability that viewed disability as an individual problem stemming from the impairment(s) of a person. Previous medical models tended to focus on diagnosis, treatment and rehabilitation of the individual. In contrast, social models place the role of social and environmental factors in restricting people with disabilities' participation at the centre stage.

While traditional medical models tend to view the limitation of a person with a disability as directly resulting from the disability itself, the Social Model views the limitation experienced by a person with a disability as being due to the barriers in a society (environmental, institutional and attitudinal) that do not permit full participation. Scholars such as Michael Oliver, who was instrumental in the development of the social model, contend that disability can be seen as a type of social exclusion created by inaccessible environments and discriminatory practices. Examples of these barriers in education include: inaccessible school buildings (e.g., no ramps or accessible toilets); inflexible curricula; the unavailability of assistive technology; and a lack of teacher training in inclusive classroom settings.

When applying the Social Model of Disability to education, it becomes clear that the majority of the obstacles that Children with Special Educational Needs face are not based on the learner themselves but rather on the structural constraints within education systems. Therefore, inclusive education requires transforming schools to be responsive to the diversity of learning needs. This includes, but is not limited to, increasing the physical accessibility of schools; making curricula flexible; promoting inclusive teaching practices; and providing students with appropriate support services.

Within the Indian context, the Social Model provides a valuable lens for conceptualising why Children with Special Educational Needs experience limited participation in school education, even when supportive policy frameworks are in place. When formal access to schooling exists,

Children with Special Educational Needs may still experience structural barriers (for example, the school's physical environment is not barrier-free; there is a shortage of special education teachers and/or a lack of assistive resources) that limit meaningful participation.

4.2 Capability Approach

A second theoretical perspective applicable to inclusive education is the Capability Approach. The Capability Approach has been developed by economists and philosophers (Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum) and emphasises enhancing individuals' capabilities and freedoms to pursue their valued lives.

According to this approach, development is not merely assessed by measures of economic growth or resource availability. Rather, the focus is on the extent to which individuals can function effectively in society.

Education is one means of enabling individuals to enhance their capabilities through the acquisition of knowledge, skills, confidence and social participation.

In the context of inclusive education, the Capability Approach highlights that access to schools is not enough. Students need the appropriate supports and resources to convert educational opportunities into meaningful learning outcomes. For example, students with disabilities require appropriate teaching methodologies, assistive technologies, supportive learning environments and social acceptance.

For Children with Special Educational Needs, the ability to participate in education is related to their ability to develop capabilities that enable them to interact with society on equal terms. Thus, inclusive education is not only focused on supporting the academic development of Children with Special Educational Needs but also on their broader goals, such as social inclusion, empowerment, and equal opportunities.

4.3 Integrating the Theoretical Perspectives

The Social Model of Disability and the Capability Approach provide complementary lenses for understanding the relationship between disability and education. While the Social Model emphasises the role of societal and institutional barriers in creating exclusion, the Capability Approach emphasises the importance of expanding opportunities to enable individuals to achieve meaningful participation and well-being.

Together, the Social Model of Disability and the Capability Approach suggest that inclusive education requires eliminating structural barriers and expanding educational opportunities. Educational policies must therefore address issues such as the accessibility of school infrastructure, teacher preparedness, curriculum flexibility, and the availability of support services.

This study uses these theoretical perspectives as a framework for analysing the participation of Children with Special Educational Needs in Indian school education. Through an examination of trends in enrollment rates, gender differences, and participation across levels of education, this study aims to identify how structural and institutional factors affect educational access and participation for Children with Special Educational Needs.

V. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

This study's conceptual framework outlines three interrelated dimensions of inclusive education — access, participation and retention of Children with Special Educational Needs — in school education. Each dimension is impacted by the collective effect of policy, institutional, and pedagogical factors that determine the educational experiences of learners with disabilities.

Therefore, inclusive education requires both physical access to schools and the creation of conditions that enable students with disabilities to participate meaningfully in classroom activities and to maintain continued educational access without encountering structural or social barriers. As such, the framework recognises that successful inclusion will depend on several interrelated components operating within the education system.

5.1 Key Dimensions of Inclusive Education

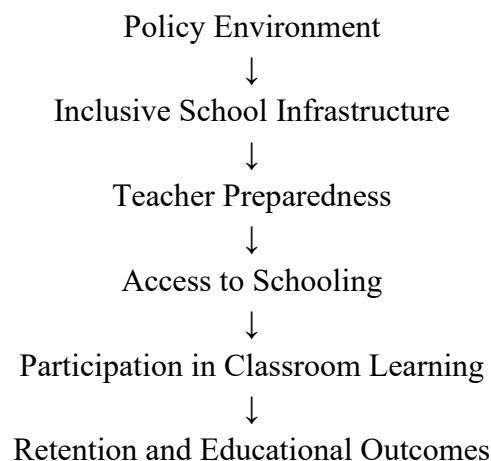
Access is defined as the ability of Children with Special Educational Needs to enter into the formal education system. Factors that could affect access for Children with Special Educational Needs include the proximity of available schools, the accessibility of educational infrastructure, supportive policies, and the identification of Children with Special Educational Needs within local communities.

Participation is defined as the active engagement of students with disabilities in classroom learning and in school activities. Participation extends beyond enrollment and encompasses the student's engagement in the teaching/learning process, interaction with peers and/or teachers and access to the necessary learning materials and support services.

Retention is defined as the ability of students with disabilities to remain within the education system and proceed through various levels of schooling. Retention is an important measure of the success of inclusive education since many students with disabilities experience challenges remaining in the education system past the primary school level.

5.2 Conceptual Model

This study's conceptual model posits that the participation and retention of Children with Special Educational Needs result from the interaction of several institutional factors within the education system.



The policy environment provides the basis for inclusive education. National policies and programs (e.g., the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, the Right to Education Act, the National Education Policy) create the regulatory structure that supports equal educational opportunities for Children with Special Educational Needs.

The second element is inclusive school infrastructure, which includes physical accessibility features (e.g., ramps, accessible classrooms, barrier-free walkways, and disabled-accessible sanitation facilities). Accessible infrastructure plays an important role in promoting regular school attendance for Children with Special Educational Needs.

The third key element is teacher preparedness. Educators trained in inclusive pedagogy are better equipped to modify instruction, develop differentiated learning opportunities and provide support to students with diverse learning requirements. Teacher preparation is a key factor in limiting the effectiveness of inclusive education initiatives.

Collectively, the institutional elements described above affect access to schooling, determining whether Children with Special Educational Needs can enrol in educational institutions.

Once enrolled, the quality of the school's infrastructure and teacher support affects the child's participation in classroom learning, including engagement in academic activities and interactions within the learning environment.

Ultimately, long-term participation contributes to retention and educational outcomes, allowing students with disabilities to progress through varying levels of education and achieve meaningful learning.

5.3 Relevance of the Framework to the Study

The conceptual model facilitates the organisation of the analysis in this chapter by relating policy initiatives, institutional conditions, and educational participation. Using UDISE data to examine enrollment patterns, gender disparities, and participation across educational levels, the study aims to understand how structural and institutional factors shape inclusive education in India.

VI. METHODOLOGY

6.1 Research Design

The present study employs a descriptive-analytical research methodology and analyses secondary data. Descriptive methodologies are particularly useful when investigating trends or patterns in student participation in educational settings. An analytical component will enable us to interpret the relationships among variables affecting inclusion in educational settings. We have used a systematic approach in our study to investigate how access and participation of Children with Special Educational Needs occur in the Indian school education system.

We have selected secondary data for the present study because national educational databases can provide large-scale information on student enrollment, infrastructure, and institutional characteristics across regions. Datasets like these allow researchers to analyse participation patterns at the national level and to identify structural barriers that may limit inclusive education. We have analysed these datasets to determine broad trends in educational access and participation among Children with Special Educational Needs, rather than conducting individual-level case studies.

6.2 Data Sources

The current study utilised multiple secondary data sources to increase the reliability and comprehensiveness of the results. The primary dataset we have used is the Unified District Information System for Education Plus (UDISE+). UDISE+ has provided annual statistical data on school education in India. UDISE+ is maintained by the Ministry of Education (India) and is considered one of the largest and most comprehensive educational databases in the world. It contains data on over 1.5 million schools and over 250 million students in India, including information on school enrollment, school infrastructure, teacher characteristics, and student performance.

In addition to UDISE+, the current study has also included data and reports from the Census of India. The Census of India provides demographic information on individuals with disabilities and their locations across the country. The Census of India data have helped place school participation trends in perspective relative to the larger population of children with disabilities.

Reports and analytic publications from international organisations, such as UNICEF and UNESCO, were also included in the current study to provide an additional perspective on disability and education. These reports have helped position the Indian experience within the broader global discussion of inclusive education.

Finally, government policy documents related to inclusive education, specifically programs such as Samagra Shiksha and policy frameworks such as the National Education Policy (2020), were reviewed to understand how educational institutions are promoting inclusive education.

6.3 Scope and Limitations of Secondary Data

There are many benefits to using secondary data for research on major educational patterns at large scales. National databases like UDISE+ include comprehensive, systematic information on school enrollment, school infrastructure, teachers, and institutional indicators across the country. Due to its broad scope, the database enables researchers to examine the participation of Children with Special Educational Needs across diverse geographic and institutional settings. Furthermore, compiling data at the national level increases the reliability and comparability of results by standardising reporting methods throughout the collection process. Additionally, there are some limitations to relying solely on secondary data that should be acknowledged.

First, this study relies on official statistics on Children with Special Educational Needs. This means that sometimes, Children with Special Educational Needs are not identified in official statistics. Additionally, under-identification and/or variations in reporting practices among schools and districts may have affected the accuracy of the data reported regarding Children with Special Educational Needs.

Second, national-level databases such as UDISE+ focus on providing quantitative measures of enrollment, school infrastructure, and institutional characteristics. These measures can help identify trends and patterns; however, they cannot capture the qualitative aspects of inclusive education, including how students interact with their classmates, how supportive teachers are toward students with disabilities, and students' experiences in the classroom.

Third, even though UDISE+ includes a wealth of data on school enrollment, infrastructure, and institutional characteristics, it does not collect detailed information on the type(s) of disabilities

or the nature of support services provided to students with disabilities within individual schools. Therefore, the primary focus of this study is on the participation of Children with Special Educational Needs, rather than on the quality of inclusive educational practices within schools.

Although there are some limitations to using secondary data, it remains an important tool for assessing larger patterns of access and participation in education. When secondary data are interpreted responsibly and in conjunction with other evidence from policy documents and research literature, they can contribute to a greater understanding of the state of inclusive education at the national level.

6.4 Ethical Considerations in Secondary Data Research

Even though this study relies on publicly available secondary data, the researcher has an obligation to consider ethical considerations when conducting the research. Although the datasets utilised in this study (i.e., UDISE+ statistics and government reports) are publicly available and do not include personally identifiable information about individual students, the researcher is still responsible for ensuring that the data are interpreted correctly and used responsibly. In addition, although the researcher did not collect data directly from participants and therefore was not required to obtain consent, the researcher is still responsible for interpreting the data and using it responsibly.

In this study, the researcher has ensured that all statistical data were analysed in accordance with the guidelines and reporting frameworks established by each data source. In addition, care was taken to ensure that the data were accurately represented and not misrepresented or misused.

Finally, the researcher properly cited and referenced all institutional data sources and published reports that were included in the data analysis. Proper citation of data sources ensures that data users understand where the data originated and allows users to verify the information included in the study.

Secondary data research involves not only the proper use of the data but also the consideration of the broader implications of the research findings. When analysing the participation of Children with Special Educational Needs in education, it is essential to interpret the findings in a way that honours their dignity and rights and highlights the systemic barriers that inhibit inclusive education.

6.5 Data Analysis

The study uses both descriptive statistical methods and analytical interpretation to assess the involvement of Children with Special Educational Needs in educational experiences throughout their schooling.

Descriptive Statistical Analysis

Descriptive statistics were employed to summarise all pertinent enrollment, gender distribution, and participation information for each level of education (Creswell, 2014; Cohen et al., 2018). Descriptive statistics were used to portray the number and distribution of Children with Special Educational Needs within the educational system.

Percentage Analysis

Percentage analysis was used to determine the proportion of Children with Special Educational Needs among all students in the overall student body and to assess gender-related differences in enrollment percentages. Percentages allow comparisons between subgroups (e.g., by gender, by grade level) (Agresti & Finlay, 2009).

Trend Analysis

Trend analysis was used to assess changes in the enrollment of Children with Special Educational Needs over time using UDISE data from multiple academic years. Trend analysis can assist in identifying if the participation of Children with Special Educational Needs in schools is growing, shrinking, or staying steady (Ministry of Education, 2022; Mehta, 2020).

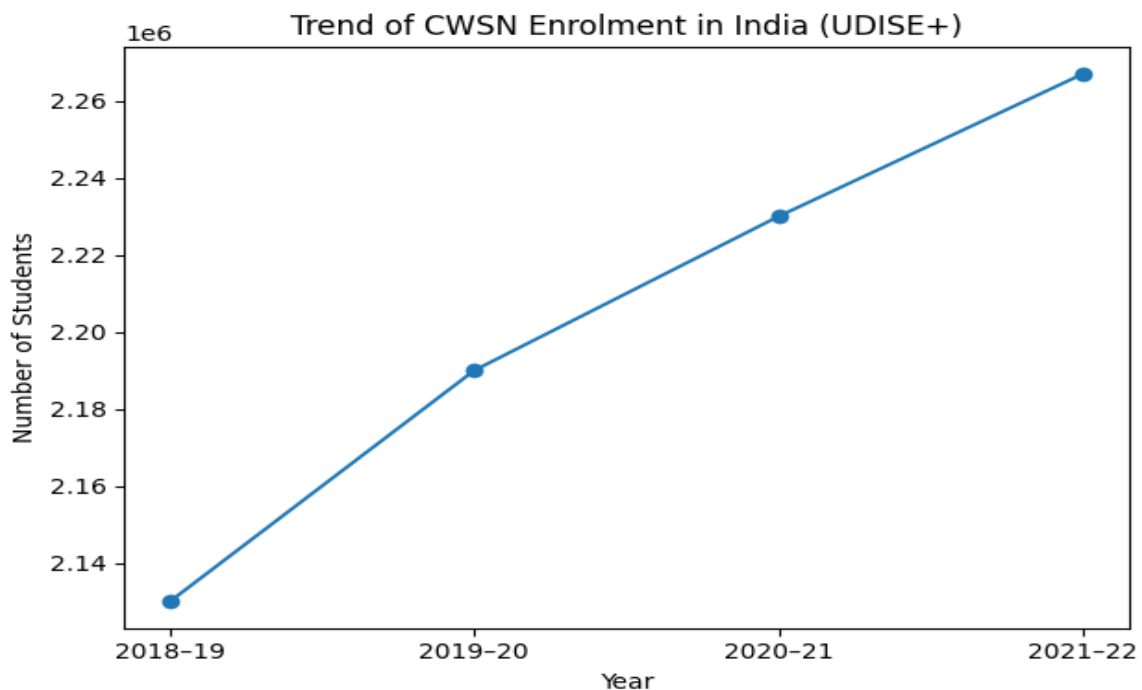
Visual Tools

Tables and graphic illustrations, such as line graphs and bar charts, are employed to clarify and facilitate the interpretation of the data, including illustrating trends in enrollment, gender distribution, and the participation of Children with Special Educational Needs across different levels of education. Visual aids help systematically interpret the data and show how the data relates to the concept of inclusion.

Table 1: Enrolment of Children with Special Needs in India

Year	Enrolment
2018–19	21.3 lakh
2019–20	21.9 lakh
2020–21	22.3 lakh
2021–22	22.67 lakh

Figure 1: Trend of Enrolment of Children with Special Needs (2018–2022)



The figure illustrates a gradual increase in enrolment of Children with Special Educational Needs in Indian schools over recent years.

Table 2: Gender Distribution of Children with Special Educational Needs

Gender	Percentage
Boys	56%
Girls	44%

Figure 2: Gender Distribution of Children with Special Needs

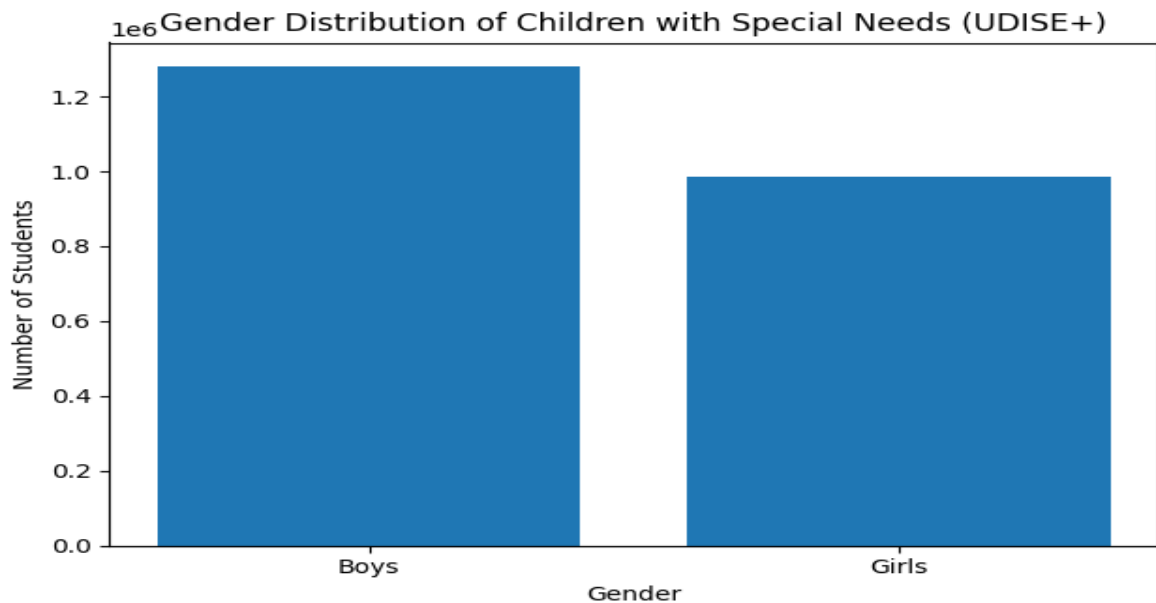
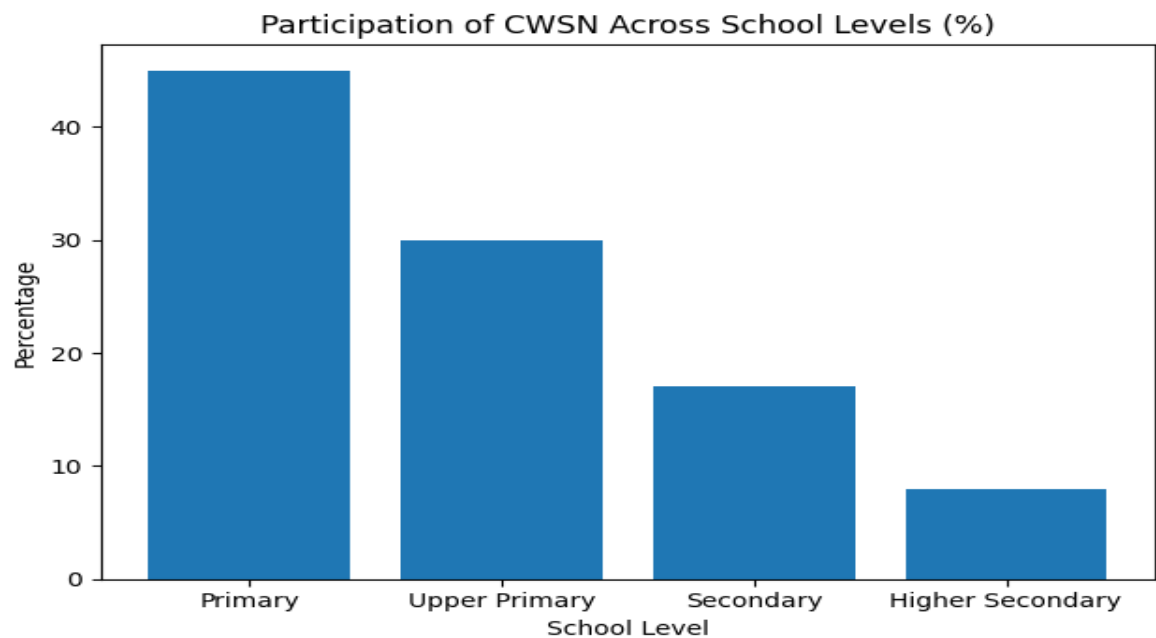


Figure 3: Participation of Children with Special Educational Needs Across Educational Levels



Primary – highest participation

Upper Primary – moderate participation

Secondary – lower participation

Higher Secondary – very low participation

Table 3: Inclusive Infrastructure Indicators

Indicator	Value
Total students enrolled	~25.57 crore
Children with special needs	~22.67 lakh
Schools with ramps	~85%
Schools with accessible toilets	~20–25%

Table 4: Comparative Analysis: India and Global Context

Indicator	India	Global Context
Children with Special Educational Needs	~7.86 million	~240 million globally
Share in school enrolment	~0.9%	1–3% in many countries
Gender participation	Boys higher	Similar pattern
Retention at higher levels	Declines	Global trend

VII. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The National Education Statistics Analysis provides a way to understand how Children with Special Educational Needs can participate in and access schooling through the Indian School Education System. The study uses the national data on enrollment trends, gender distribution, participation across different levels of education and indicators of infrastructure that would enable inclusive education to analyse data from the Ministry of Education (India) Unified District Information System for Education Plus (UDISE+),

Trends in Enrollment of Children with Special Needs

The data on enrollment provided in Table 1 and illustrated in Figure 1 show an upward trend in the number of children with special needs enrolled in Indian schools in recent years. The enrollment figures rose from approximately 21.3 lakh in 2018-19 to approximately 22.67 lakh in 2021-22 (Ministry of Education, 2022; Mehta, 2020). This upward trend shows progress toward improving access to schooling for Children with Special Educational Needs in India. Progress toward strengthening the inclusive education policy in India may have helped improve access to schooling for Children with Special Educational Needs.

The rise in enrollment numbers may be due in part to national programs like Samagra Shiksha, which focus on inclusive education by funding assistive devices, resource teachers, and upgrades to school infrastructure. Additionally, increased community awareness of Children with Special Educational Needs and greater identification of such children may have contributed to the higher enrollment numbers.

Even though enrollment has increased gradually, the percentage of Children with Special Educational Needs in the total school population remains very low. Data from the UDISE indicate that children with special needs account for less than 1% of the total school enrolment. Therefore, it appears that a large number of Children with Special Educational Needs may be

excluded from the formal education system, necessitating stronger outreach initiatives and early identification programs.

Gender Distribution of Children with Special Educational Needs

Table 2 and Figure 2 show the gender distribution of enrolled Children with Special Educational Needs, indicating that boys represent a slightly larger share (56% boys vs. 44% girls). The gender disparity in the enrollment of Children with Special Educational Needs illustrates the broader cultural and economic factors that affect their ability to participate in educational opportunities (Singal, 2016; UNESCO, 2020).

Research studies in several developing countries illustrate that girls with disabilities face multiple disadvantages, including being subject to societal expectations or norms based on their gender, being economically disadvantaged and having negative social attitudes toward people with disabilities (UNICEF, 2021; Singal, 2016). Families who are economically challenged may prioritise the education of boys over girls when there are limited resources available for education.

Therefore, the development of gender sensitive, inclusive education policies that recognise the unique barriers that girls with disabilities encounter in participating in education is critical. Programs to promote girls' education in combination with community awareness initiatives and increased accessibility to schools could aid in reducing the disparity in educational participation of boys and girls with disabilities.

Participation Patterns at Different Levels of Education

The participation patterns shown in Figure 3 demonstrate that enrollment of Children with Special Educational Needs is significantly higher at the primary level and decreases as students progress to upper primary, secondary, and higher secondary levels.

This decline in participation demonstrates that while access to elementary education for Children with Special Educational Needs has improved, the ability to retain these students and successfully transition them to subsequent educational stages represents a major barrier. As students advance to higher levels of education, academic requirements become increasingly challenging, and additional supportive mechanisms may be necessary to meet the needs of students with disabilities (UNESCO, 2020; World Bank, 2019).

There are several reasons for the decrease in participation at higher levels of education. First, many schools do not have teachers who specialise in teaching students with disabilities using an inclusive pedagogical approach and therefore cannot adequately support the academic development of students with disabilities. Second, assistive technologies and curricular adaptations to facilitate learning may not be readily available in many educational institutions. Additionally, the location of schools, especially secondary schools, far from students' homes, may limit access for students with disabilities due to transportation challenges. All of these factors collectively lead to decreased participation in higher education.

Inclusive Infrastructure and Institutional Support

The infrastructure indicators in Table 3 constitute an important institutional component of inclusive education (Ainscow & Miles, 2008; UNESCO, 2020). Although a large number of schools have provided basic access for students with disabilities, including ramps

(approximately 85% of all schools), few schools have implemented disabled friendly toilet facilities (only 20-25% of all schools).

The lack of accessible sanitation facilities limits the ability of students with disabilities to participate comfortably and with dignity in their school environment. This lack of accessibility, especially if combined with gender-based barriers, can negatively affect the frequency of student attendance, particularly for young women with disabilities.

In summary, these results show that although there has been some improvement to date in enhancing school accessibility, additional investment will be needed to ensure that schools provide a comprehensive barrier-free environment. Therefore, any future infrastructure enhancements must be complemented by teacher training, the provision of assistive technology, and the development of inclusive learning materials.

Comparative Analysis: India and the Global Context

The comparative data presented in Table 4 place India's experience in the broader context of global trends in inclusive education. Based on the Census of India, there are approximately 7.86 million people with disabilities identified; however, it is estimated that approximately 240 million children worldwide live with disabilities (UNICEF, 2021).

Although the percentage of Children with Special Educational Needs enrolled in school in India is approximately 0.9%, this is generally below the 1-3% range found in many other countries. These differences may be partially attributed to variations in how disability is identified and reported, as well as in the availability of educational services.

Similarities in the experiences of India and globally include the trend of declining participation of students with disabilities in higher levels of education. Internationally, there is evidence to support the notion that transitioning from primary to secondary education presents greater challenges for students with disabilities due to increased academic expectations and limited institutional support (UNESCO, 2020; World Bank, 2019).

The gender inequity evident in Indian enrollment patterns is also reflected in global trends. In many developing countries, boys with disabilities have higher enrollment rates than girls, suggesting that gender inequity still exists in inclusive education systems.

Based on the comparative data, India has made progress toward increasing access to education for Children with Special Educational Needs; however, additional efforts will be needed to enhance retention, gender equity, and the institutional support mechanisms necessary to provide high-quality education to students with disabilities.

VIII. IMPLICATIONS FOR EDUCATIONAL POLICY AND PRACTICE

This research has several significant implications for strengthening inclusive education policies and practices in India. Although the results show there is a steady increase in the number of Children with Special Educational Needs enrolled in school, the research found that there are significant inequalities in terms of equitable participation and retention of students with disabilities throughout all levels of schooling. To address the remaining challenges, it will be necessary to implement coordinated policies, institutional practices and pedagogies.

There appears to be a large percentage of Children with Special Educational Needs who are not included in the formal education system due to the relatively small number of students with

disabilities compared to the total number of students enrolled in school. Therefore, it will be important to strengthen early identification systems for Children with Special Educational Needs. This could involve conducting community-based surveys, collaborating with local health and social welfare agencies or developing new reporting systems to assist in identifying Children with Special Educational Needs at an early age.

Several programs under the national program "Samagra Shiksha" emphasise identifying and supporting students with special needs; however, raising community awareness and developing additional outreach initiatives could enhance access to schooling for Children with Special Educational Needs.

The analysis of school infrastructure also demonstrates that there remains a need to improve school accessibility. While there is a marked increase in the number of ramps available in schools, the relatively small number of accessible sanitation facilities indicates that schools continue to struggle to create fully inclusive environments. As a result, school infrastructure planning should focus on creating full barrier-free environments (i.e., accessible classrooms, bathrooms, hallways and transportation systems). Planning for school environments should also incorporate universal design principles to accommodate the varying learning needs of all students.

Teacher preparation has been shown to play a critical role in the effective implementation of inclusive education. When teachers are trained in inclusive pedagogy, they are better able to develop their own instructional strategies to meet students' individual needs and provide differentiated instruction for students with diverse abilities (Forlin, 2010; Sharma & Deppeler, 2005).

Policies such as the National Education Policy 2020 emphasise the need to strengthen teacher education programs to include training in inclusive teaching practices. Increasing pre-service and in-service professional development for teachers on inclusive education will be key to expanding student participation and learning opportunities for students with disabilities in the classroom.

Gender disparities were also apparent in the data from the analysis, which emphasises the need for targeted interventions to promote the educational participation of girls with disabilities. Disability-sensitive strategies should be incorporated into policies that promote gender equity in order to remove the barriers that exist for girls with disabilities in their homes and communities. Scholarships, transportation support, and community awareness initiatives may help encourage families to support the education of girls with disabilities. Additionally, creating safe and accessible school environments may help enhance the educational participation of girls with disabilities.

The analysis indicated that participation declined at the secondary and higher secondary levels of schooling, suggesting that retention is a major problem in inclusive education. Providing consistent support services for students with disabilities will be essential in helping them move through various levels of schooling. For example, support services such as assistive technology, specialised teaching materials, resource teachers, and academic counselling can help students with disabilities overcome the challenges of pursuing post-secondary education.

Ultimately, strengthening inclusive education will require coordination in implementing inclusive education policies and practices across different sectors. Education policies should be implemented in conjunction with health, social welfare and community development

policies to address the diverse needs of students with disabilities. Establishing effective monitoring mechanisms and using data to inform policy decisions will be critical to ensuring that inclusive education initiatives result in tangible improvements in access to education, participation in education and the outcomes of education for students with disabilities.

IX. FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

While this study contributes a great deal to our knowledge of how Children with Special Educational Needs access and participate in schooling in India using national educational statistics, many areas still need further study. The analysis in this chapter was conducted primarily from secondary data. In contrast, this form of data allows us to analyse large-scale trends; it does not allow us to assess how teachers, students and families experience inclusive education through the day-to-day operations of inclusive schools.

Therefore, future studies should consider using a mixed-methods or qualitative approach to understand how inclusive education policies are implemented at the school and classroom levels. Examples of additional topics that future studies can explore include assessing teachers' perceptions of inclusive pedagogy, the experiences of students with disabilities in mainstream classroom settings, and how family support affects students with disabilities' participation in education, to gain a deeper understanding of the effectiveness of inclusive education models.

Another significant area for future study is regional inequalities in inclusive education. Students with disabilities may have very different rates of participation in schooling depending on their state and/or district of residence, because of varying levels of physical infrastructure, varying degrees of compliance with inclusive education policies, and differing socio-economic conditions in their respective communities. Future comparative studies examining regional variation in the participation of students with disabilities in schooling may help identify successful practices and policy options to improve school inclusivity.

Finally, future studies could examine how assistive technologies, digital learning platforms, and innovative forms of inclusive pedagogy support the participation of students with disabilities in schooling. As technology-enabled learning increasingly becomes a focus in education, it will be especially important to understand how digital tools can expand access to and learning opportunities for students with disabilities.

Through exploration of these areas, future studies can contribute to the development of inclusive education policies and practices and to the creation of a more just and responsive education system.

X. CONCLUSION

Access to quality education for Children with Special Educational Needs is a fundamental human right and social inclusion issue; it is also an important element in creating equitable and socially just education systems through inclusive education.

This chapter utilised information from national educational statistics and international reports to examine the access and participation of Children with Special Educational Needs in Indian school education.

The data used in this study showed that India has achieved some notable success in increasing access to schooling for Children with Special Educational Needs. Trends in enrollment of children with special needs, as demonstrated by UDISE+, show an upward trend in the enrollment of Children with Special Educational Needs in schools.

National programs and policy initiatives aimed at promoting inclusive education have raised public awareness and increased opportunities for Children with Special Educational Needs to access the formal education system.

However, while there was evidence of notable successes in increasing access to education for Children with Special Educational Needs, there was also evidence of ongoing challenges in achieving inclusive education. The number of Children with Special Educational Needs enrolled in schools remains a small fraction of the total number of children enrolled, suggesting that many Children with Special Educational Needs continue to lack access to the education system. Additionally, the data used in this study show that the percentage of Children with Special Educational Needs who continue to enrol in school declines significantly as students advance to higher levels of schooling, demonstrating ongoing challenges in retaining Children with Special Educational Needs in school.

There were also gender-related inequalities evident in the data used in this study, with girls with disabilities experiencing even greater barriers than boys with disabilities in accessing education.

Finally, there were concerns about schools' preparedness to provide accessible infrastructure to meet the needs of Children with Special Educational Needs. For example, while there are signs of improvement in the availability of accessibility features such as ramps, many schools lack disability-friendly sanitation facilities and specialised learning resources, indicating that schools are generally not well equipped to support inclusive education.

Additionally, there are concerns about the availability of teachers trained to implement inclusive instructional practices, and this availability varies widely across schools.

Overall, these findings suggest that providing access to education for Children with Special Educational Needs is insufficient to ensure inclusive education. To create sustainable progress, inclusive education requires a holistic approach that incorporates available, accessible infrastructure, prepared teachers, inclusive learning environments, and successful policy implementation. Building on existing programs (such as Samagra Shiksha) and supporting the inclusive vision established in the National Education Policy 2020 will be critical to improve the participation and retention of Children with Special Educational Needs in the education system.

More broadly, inclusive education can be seen as a transformative process that changes how schools function and how they serve student diversity. Developing inclusive schools requires both policy commitment and collaboration among educators, community members, policymakers and civil society organisations.

In conclusion, developing inclusive education will help build a more equitable and inclusive society in which Children with Special Educational Needs can reach their full potential and engage in productive roles in society and the economy. Therefore, continued policy focus, institutional investment, and community engagement will be necessary to ensure that the promise of inclusive education translates into meaningful opportunities for all students.

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