

Inclusive Education for Children with Special Needs Some Reflections from Odisha, India

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Abstract

Inclusive education is based on the notion that every child should share the same classroom, regardless of caste, ethnicity, age, gender or disability. It recognises every learner's potential, and each child's specific needs and abilities. There are several obstructing factors, such as inappropriate curriculum, lack of trained teachers, insufficient financial provisions, unfitting infrastructure and classroom environment, that affect the teaching-learning process. Using empirical data, the study was conducted in one of the blocks of western Odisha and has emphasised the need for inclusive school environment, better support mechanism and societal awareness. The study examines the challenges confronted by CwSNs in pursuing their education, and assesses parental and teachers' awareness. It was revealed that most of the schools did not have CwSN friendly TLMs and IED trained teachers. The need for better infrastructure and specialised care for the CwSNs in an inclusive environment was felt by all the participants.

INTRODUCTION

Every child's fundamental entitlement to education is not one of altruism or compassion. The main factor in societal change is education. Inclusive

education aims to accommodate students with disabilities under one roof in the classroom (Singh, 2016). The fundamental human right of inclusion brings everyone under

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one roof regardless of caste, colour, age, gender or disability. A global assessment of disability estimates that 15 per cent of people have some form of disability.

CwSNs around the world were neglected until the eighteenth century (Chakraborti and Ghosh, 2017). Inclusive education may help all students to learn and develop together, regardless of their backgrounds (UNICEF, 2003). According to the Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD), inclusion refers to a child's full-time participation in their neighborhood school (MHRD, 2005). Enrollment of CwSNs in a general education setting is insufficient for inclusive education if the school lack proper physical environment, specially qualified teachers, properly constructed ramps, CwSN-friendly Teaching Learning Materials (T.L.M.), and an Individualised Educational Plan (IEP). The school must implement reforms in the areas of infrastructure, classroom administration, pedagogy, sports, and culture (CBSE, 2020). Implementing inclusive education is difficult for teachers and CwSNs due to both internal and external factors, therefore, suitable infrastructure, curriculum, and teaching methods should be available for CwSNs in general schools (Jha, 2007).

NEED AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This research conducted in the region of Dhankauda Block, Sambalpur district, Odisha, delves into the

barriers faced by CwSNs in accessing inclusive education. The study aims to identify and address these challenges, contributing to the formulation of inclusive educational policies and implementation strategies. By exploring the experiences and perspectives of various stakeholders, the research informs the need for customised teaching approaches, enhancing the overall inclusivity of the educational environment. Additionally, a comprehensive review of literature may provide valuable insights into existing knowledge base and gaps, further strengthening the study's foundation.

GLOBAL SCENARIO OF INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

The historical origins of inclusive education can be found in Canada and the United States. The United Nations issued the Education for All (EFA) in the 1990s to integrate disabled children into regular education. There is an international endeavour to guarantee everyone's right to an education. The inclusive policy was established at the 'World Conference on Special Needs Education: Access and Quality' (Salamanca Statement, UNESCO, 1994). The worldwide prevalence of disability is higher than WHO (World Health Organisation) estimates prior to the 1970s put the number at around 10 per cent. Even though disability impacts almost one in six of us. Many people with disabilities continue to be excluded from social and economic possibilities

because there is a lack of a suitable physical environment, government services, assistive devices, and technologies. According to the World Health Survey, approximately 785 million (15.6 per cent) people aged 15 and over live with a disability, while the Global Burden of Disease estimates the number to be closer to 975 million (19.4 per cent). The Global Burden of Disease estimates that 190 million (3.8 per cent) of these have 'severe disability,' which is the same as the disability implied by conditions like quadriplegia, severe depression, or blindness. The World Health Survey estimates that 110 million people (2.2 per cent) have significant difficulties with functioning. Only the Global Burden of Disease measures childhood disability (0–14 years) of which 13 million (0.7 per cent) have 'severe disability' or 95 million children (WHO, 2008).

INCLUSIVE EDUCATION IN INDIAN CONTEXT

The Integrated Education for Disabled Children (IEDC) initiative was launched by the Indian Government in 1974. The first deaf school opened in 1883 in Mumbai, while the first school for the blind opened in 1887 in Amritsar. CwSNs are children who require special care, unique needs, and specific necessities in comparison to general children. According to the Ministry of Education, 'inclusion' refers to a child's full-time participation in their neighborhood school (Ministry

of Education, 2005). It is said that enrolling CwSNs is very challenging. Studies revealed that a sizable portion of children who are not in school are those who have an impairment. It may imply that 47 million of the 301.4 million kids who were not enrolled in school or who dropped out are CwSNs. Approximately 1.54 per cent of the 2.21 per cent impaired population in India is under the age of five, while 1.82 per cent is between the ages of ten and nineteen (Census, 2011). Only 1.17 per cent of these, or 25.6 million kids, are enrolled in Grades I to XII (Mehta, 2015). A holistic, all-encompassing, and cross-disciplinary approach is inclusive education, where all pupils are housed under one roof. Both the societal level and the educational system in India need to be changed appropriately. The teacher's attitude should shift towards the CwSNs (Sharma, 2018).

CHALLENGES IN INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

Impaired children and teachers, both confront several challenges in an inclusive school. Inclusive education ensures that no one falls behind. The entire student body ought to be integrated into one classroom community. The teacher should make the class enjoyable (Singh, 2016). There is minimum support system for CwSNs in India's regular schools.

Limited Infrastructure for CWSNs

A teacher faces several challenges, including a lack of knowledge about

disabled children, time constraints, overwork, financial issues and infrastructural facilities (Oosero, 2015). The administration, teaching staff and school management committee (SMC) must cooperate to accommodate a special needs child in a regular classroom with other students (Madan and Sharma, 2013). Participation in computer games, art classes, music lessons and skill development classes should be encouraged for CWSNs (Das and Kattumuri, 2011).

Inadequate Teachers Training

Without a certified special teacher and awareness among the instructors, inclusive education become difficult. A teacher must be knowledgeable about inclusion policies. The curriculum should be tailored for the special needs child and the teacher should be knowledgeable of some unique teaching methods (Majoko, 2019). Approximately 70 per cent of elementary teachers lack the necessary training to work with students who have special needs. The success of the inclusion policy depends on how well the teachers are trained. Every instructor should have complete special training to educate a child with an impairment (Hettiarachchi and Das, 2014). About 90 per cent of educators and students in Zambia favour inclusive education yet, there is still a perception that CwSNs need separate schools (Muwana and Ostrosky, 2014). In India, teacher preparation needs to be enhanced to ensure that students

with special needs have equal access to education (Das et al., 2013). The teachers should adopt new teaching strategies and modify their conventional ones. Teachers should receive special education training and also have knowledge of teaching aids to instruct deaf children (Cockcroft et al., 2010).

Lack of Awareness towards Inclusive Education

A nation like India lacks specific education facilities because 78 per cent of its population lives in rural areas, so awareness is necessary for the successful implementation of inclusive education. Both traditional and distance learning formats for teacher preparation are available in India. It has emphasised the value of pre-service or in-service distance learning for teachers, particularly for CwSNs. It is not justified to send disabled children to special schools (Sanjeev and Kumar, 2007). There are various policies for inclusive education being implemented in India, but they won't be successful until our teachers and administrators are properly skilled (Chakraborty and Ghosh, 2017). According to the researcher, if teachers, administrators, parents, and the community work together, they can close the achievement gap (Hayes and Bulat, 2017). School Managing Committee (SMC) also helps in promoting CwSNs. SMC played a crucial role in enhancing education quality, mid-day meals programme supervision and school

infrastructure (Bhue and Paltasingh, 2020). A major threat to inclusive education is teachers' ignorance about special needs education. The teacher should be knowledgeable of the students' emotions of inclusion and what may be done to enhance those feelings (Jake, 2020). Teachers, students, and parents need to be aware of the value of inclusive education and the importance of special education, for a disabled child to benefit from this approach (Marian et al., 2020).

RATIONALE OF THE RESEARCH

This research is prompted by the pressing need to address the gaps in understanding the challenges faced by CwSNs in accessing inclusive education in Sambalpur district, Odisha. The study can contribute in understanding the ground level reality, can help policy formulation, better implementation and the enhancement of inclusivity within the educational framework.

THEORETICAL CONTEXT

Each of the following theoretical perspective contributes in understanding and addressing the challenges in inclusive education for CwSNs.

Freire's Pedagogy of the Oppressed [1970 (2000)]

In Pedagogy of the Oppressed Freire has tried to help the oppressed to contest and recoup their lost humanity. He has outlined steps with

which the oppressed can understand their own oppression and identify their oppressors. Freire's theory can be applicable in empowering CwSNs, who are largely oppressed. Self-expression among them within the classroom can address the challenge. However, implementing in practical terms due to varying needs and contexts may be tough.

Goffman's Concept of Stigma (1974)

Goffman in his theory examines stigma as an attribute, behaviour or repute which is socially discrediting and classifies people in an unwanted, excluded and typecast manner. Stigmatisation can be a significant barrier for CwSNs in a formal setting. Negative societal perceptions and stereotypes can lead to social exclusion, affecting their educational experiences. Overcoming the stigma is crucial to fostering an inclusive environment where all students feel accepted and valued. Challenges here might involve changing deep-rooted societal attitudes and perceptions.

Eliot Friedson's Labeling Theory (1970)

Eliot Friedson's labeling theory is linked with disability studies, which promotes the idea of social construction of disability as the social rejoinder to a deviance from the norm. According to this view medical industry is the creator of the disabled social roles and largely articulated

by the medical professionals. Due to an impairment, restriction or limitation from reaching the social description of health, the individual is categorised as disabled. Hence, disability may not be defined by the physical features, rather through a deviance from conventional view of health. Similarly, the narrations and views on CwSNs are largely constructed, which can be altered through relevant interventions.

STATEMENT OF THE RESEARCH

PROBLEM

Despite significant initiatives by the Government of India like the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education (RTE) Act of 2009 and the *Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan* (SSA 2001); inclusive education in Indian schools remains a formidable challenge. The specific problem of the current study is to find out the barriers, challenges, experiences, teacher awareness and perceptions of CwSNs on inclusive education in Dhankauda Block, Sambalpur district, Odisha.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To examine the available provisions for inclusive education in the selected Schools.
2. To find out the challenges encountered by the CwSNs.
3. To assess the degree of awareness among the teachers and parents on inclusive education.

METHODOLOGY AND MATERIALS

Fifty study participants including CwSNs, their parents and teachers were selected from the above mentioned three high schools of Dhankauda block of Sambalpur district for the study purpose. The research design for the study was descriptive and exploratory because there was an attempt to describe a population precisely and thoroughly. Among the respondents 10 CwSNs, 20 teachers, 20 parents were selected for the study. These 3 schools had total 10 CwSNs; 5 of the 10 CwSNs were physically challenged, 3 were mentally challenged and 2 were visually impaired.

Sampling Technique

Non-probability sampling technique has been used by purposely selecting participants based on specific criteria, such as types of disabilities, to gain targeted representation and a focused investigation on the experiences of the CwSNs. Three specific schools were chosen—Jyoti Vihar High School, Jawahar Navodaya Vidyalaya and Government Boys High School Burla, within the Dhankauda block of Sambalpur district, Odisha and all the CwSNs from these schools are taken as study participants.

Research Tools

Questionnaires and interview schedules are used to collect primary data from participants including CwSNs, their parents and

teachers as per the study objectives. These tools help us in gathering a variety of perspectives, experiences and challenges faced by CwSNs. Observation was made during data collection to capture nuances like student-teacher interactions, seating arrangements for CwSNs, and attitudes of teachers and peers towards them.

Reliability and Validity

Reliability and validity are ensured to have the consistency and the accuracy of a measure by following scientific method. In this study, all the research steps are followed and appropriate tools like questionnaires, and interview schedules are used to gather information relevant to the experiences and challenges faced by CwSNs in formal education settings. In additions to this, in-depth interview is taken to probe more into the study topic.

Statistical Methods

Descriptive statistics are primarily used to describe the basic structures of the data in a study. This study has employed descriptive statistics, such as frequencies and percentages for simple quantitative analysis. Basic summaries about the sample and the measures have been derived. The study has supplemented primary data with secondary sources like books, journals, reports, and school records.

DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE OF THE STUDY PARTICIPANTS

Table 1 reveals the socioeconomic profile of the participants. Out of the total study participants, OBC categories made up the majority (52 per cent) where 32 per cent belongs to general categories. Only 16 per cent of them comes under the SC category and no ST students are found in these schools.

Table 1
Demographic Profile of the Respondents

Themes	Categories	Frequency and Percentage (%)
Type of Impairment (N=10)	VI	02 (20%)
	MR	03 (30%)
	PH	05 (50%)
Social Categories (N=10)	General	03 (30%)
	OBC	05 (50%)
	SC	02 (20%)
	ST	Nil
Education and Age (N=10)	Grade 8 (10–12 years)	03 (30%)
	Grade 9 (13–14 years)	03 (30%)
	Grade 10 (15–16 years)	04 (40%)

Occupation of Parents (N=20)	Agriculture	12 (60%)
	Self employed	08 (40%)
Yearly Income of the Parents (N=20)	Below 1,00,000	05 (25%)
	1,00,001-2,00,000	09 (45%)
	2,00,001-2,50,000	06 (30%)

**Source: Primary Data, 2022*

According to Table 1, out of the total respondents, 40 per cent of respondents study in Grade X and their age range is in the categories of 15 to 16 years. Approximately 30 per cent of them study in both Grade VIII and IX, and their age range is in the categories of 10 to 12 years, and 13 to 14 years, respectively. Underprivileged CwSNs experience more stress than other children (Limaye, 2016). Table 1 reveals that socio-economic background of the parents of CwSNs is not very strong. Out of the 20 parents' respondents, 60 per cent are employed as agricultural laborers, and 40 per cent of them are self-employed like vegetable vendor and having their fast-food shops. Among the 20 parents, 25 per cent of them earn less than ₹100,000 annually, whereas 45 per cent of the study participants earn between ₹100,001 to 200,000 annually. Only 30 per cent of them had incomes above ₹200,000. It demonstrates that the majority of the respondents' economic situation was not favourable.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The quality and utility of our work are known through the process of

data collection and data analysis. Empirical data was gathered from the three Government schools of Sambalpur district, Odisha.

Status of Available Provision for CwSNs

The observations of the study demonstrated that the infrastructure and the school environment were not satisfactory for the implementation of inclusive education. In contrast, the majority of CwSN parents were dissatisfied with the school's infrastructure.

Table 2 demonstrates that out of the selected three schools, only one (Navodaya School) had all the infrastructural provisions for the CwSNs. The study depicts that the school's space management during classes was not adequate for visually impairment children. Nearly 20 per cent of students are dissatisfied with the space management of the classroom, whereas, 80 per cent of them feel the classroom space management is adequate. Now, in India, every school has a provision for the ramp. According to the survey, only two schools out of three had ramps for CwSNs. The quality of ramps at one school was not

Table 2
Available Infrastructure for CwSNs

Provision for CwSNs	Response	Frequency and Percentage (%)
Infrastructure (N=10)	Satisfactory	04 (40%)
	Unsatisfactory	06 (60%)
Space Management (N=10)	Adequate	08 (80%)
	Inadequate	02 (20%)
Ramps (N=3 School)	Available	02 (67%)
	Unavailable	01 (33%)
Quality of Ramps (N=2 School)	Good	01 (50%)
	Bad	01 (50%)
Toilet Facilities (N=3 School)	Accessible	01 (33%)
	Inaccessible	02 (67%)

**Source: Primary Data, 2022*

satisfactory. Only one school had CwSN-friendly toilets, while others did not have the toilet facilities. Based on the observation and interview with the study participants it is revealed that no school had Teaching Learning Materials (TLMs) and Individualised Educational Plan (IEP) for the CwSNs. Some suggestions have emerged after the interview with the parents and teachers. They have suggested that syllabus for CwSNs need to be changed, and teachers need to receive the IED (Inclusive Education for Differently-abled) training. All the stakeholders feel the need for better infrastructure and specialised care for the CwSNs. Studies also reveal that there are pedagogy, curriculum, infrastructure, and student-centric approach-related barriers in Indian schools (Mahapatra, and Sharma, 2007; Paltasingh, 2018).

The Challenges Confronted by CwSNs

Table 3 depicts the challenges encountered by CwSNs in selected schools. According to the findings, about 80 per cent of the respondents are pleased with their teachers, while only 20 per cent are not satisfied with their teachers' cooperation.

According to Table 3, 60 per cent of the respondents felt that there was not enough equipment in the classroom for a child with special need. The table demonstrates that 20 per cent of the respondents were neglected by the teachers, while 20 per cent of students reported issues with the seating arrangements in the classroom. Without peer groups, a child's development is not feasible. The peer group is crucial to a child's socialisation. In the

Table 3
Challenges Confronted by the CwSNs

Themes	Response	Frequency and percentages (%)
Students Response on Teachers' Co-operation (N=10)	Helpful	08 (80%)
	Unhelpful	02 (20%)
Major Challenges Encountered by CwSNs (N=10)	Negligence of Teachers	02 (20%)
	Lack of CwSN Friendly Equipment	06 (60%)
	Sitting Arrangement	02 (20%)
	Negligence of Peer Groups	02 (20%)
	Feeling of Exclusion	02 (20%)
	Isolation	04 (40%)
	School Travelling Issues	02(20%)
	Poor Parental Involvement	04 (40%)
	Lack of CwSNs Friendly TLMs	10 (100%)
	Unavailability of IEP	10 (100%)
	Lack of IED Trained Teachers	05 (50%)
Negative Impact of Impairment on CwSNs (N=10)	Psychological	03 (30%)
	Social	08 (80%)
	Academic	05 (50%)

**Source: Primary Data, 2022*

chosen schools, about 80 per cent of the peer group displayed excellent behaviour towards the CwSNs. Only 20 per cent of the respondents exhibit rude conduct toward CwSNs in the selected schools. CwSNs have faced numerous difficulties in general education.

Students may experience isolation if they are frequently subjected to discrimination because of their impairment. According to the

respondents, learning materials in selected schools are inadequate. Some children who live in rural areas commute to schools with substantial distances on bicycles or on foot. Some parents were working long hours and didn't have time to visit the schools to talk to the teachers about the difficulties faced by their children. Table 3 demonstrate that 20 per cent of the respondents believe that they have been treated unfairly.

Around 40 per cent of the parents did not participate in school meetings and were unaware of inclusive education. Table 3 demonstrates how impairment impacts a CwSN’s life. Approximately 80 per cent of the respondents explained impairment had a negative impact on their social life, while 30 per cent said that impairment had a psychological impact on them. About 50 per cent of them had experienced negative impact on academic life. People have a negative attitude toward physically impaired children (Biswas and Panda, 2004).

Awareness of Teachers and Parents towards Inclusive Education

Table 4 demonstrates the level of teachers’ awareness towards inclusive education. Different impairments

need different instructional strategies. Without a qualified IED trained teacher obtaining inclusive education is difficult. The curriculum must be CwSN student-friendly (UNICEF 2003). Table 4 depicts that 80 per cent of teachers are aware of the inclusive policy, but only 20 per cent are unaware of inclusive education.

Table 4 demonstrate the parent-teacher relationship in the selected schools. It demonstrates how frequently they speak with CwSN parents. About 60 per cent of teachers stated that they interact with CwSNs’ parents on a regular basis, while 40 per cent indicated they only interact with their parents when necessary. The information above demonstrates the value of inclusive education. The table depicts that 30 per cent of the respondents did not acknowledge any effectiveness

Table 4
Awareness of Parents and Teachers towards Inclusive Education (IE)

Themes	Response	Frequency and Percentage (%)
Awareness of teachers towards IE (N=20)	Aware	16 (80%)
	Unaware	04 (20%)
Teacher and parents’ meeting (N=40)	Monthly	24 (60%)
	As Required	16 (40%)
Effectiveness of IE (N=40)	Effective	28 (70%)
	Ineffective	12 (30%)
Awareness of parents towards IE (N=20)	Aware	14 (70%)
	Unaware	06 (30%)
Parents’ views on CwSNs’ improvement after enrolment (N=20)	Improved	04 (20%)
	Slightly Improved	12 (60%)
	No Improvement	04 (20%)

**Source: Primary Data, 2022*

of inclusive education, while 70 per cent of them were in support of inclusive education. One of the most crucial factors in any programme's successful execution is awareness. Approximately, 70 per cent of the parents are aware of inclusive education. Additionally, they support their children's desire to learn in an inclusive school. According to the data, 30 per cent of parents are unaware of inclusive education.

About 20 per cent of them experienced overall development of their children. The 60 per cent of them agreed that their children had improved a little and the remaining 20 per cent of respondents had noticed no changes among their children.

The purpose of the current study was to examine the difficulties and success of inclusive education in Dhankauda block of Sambalpur District, Odisha, using both primary and secondary data. Purposive sampling was used to acquire the data. The data reveals the poor income of CwSNs' parents. Based on the observation and the interviews it was revealed that the sample schools have faced infrastructure issues. Adequate Government funding for CwSN infrastructure, teaching resources and necessary equipment can make inclusive education more effective. The CwSNs have confronted challenges like sitting arrangement, negligence of peer groups, feeling of exclusion, isolation, school travelling issues and poor-parental involvement in schools. It was revealed that most of the

schools did not have CwSNs friendly TLMs and IED trained teachers. Such issues need policy attention at both micro and macro context.

SUGGESTIONS AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

Promoting inclusiveness is not simply the responsibility of the school teachers. The schools should be prepared to accommodate CwSNs. A school that is inclusive must be able to adapt its educational structures, techniques and procedures to meet the requirements of all students. Parents have the right to participate in any decision affecting their children. Schools must prepare in advance for the adjustments needed to integrate students with special needs into the general schools. Infrastructure needs to change to make it easier for CwSNs. In terms of infrastructure, restrooms, and other service facilities should include ramps and wheelchair access. The IED should be introduced and made effective in all schools having CwSNs along with teachers with necessary training about inclusion and its principles. The Persons with Disabilities Act 1995 ensures that every child with an impairment has the right to receive a free education until he or she turns 18 years old. As per the provisions in SSA, 2002 and RTE, 2009, it is ensured that every child, irrespective of caste, ethnicity gender, or special needs, has the access to a quality and meaningful education. The SMC members should promote the education of CwSNs and those from underprivileged

groups. The CwSNs face numerous difficulties, including a lack of parental participation, discrimination from others and a sense of isolation. The 2006 Persons with Disability Act (PwD Act) valued PwD as a resource. The Act creates a setting where PwDs have equal access to rights and opportunities (NCERT, 2021).

LIMITATION AND FUTURE

IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY

Due to time and resource constraints this study has certain limitations, as it is collected from one block of Sambalpur district, Odisha. A larger study with more coverage could have been more conclusive. Additionally, the study primarily relies on the perspectives of participants, such as CwSNs, parents and teachers within this specific geographical area.

Despite these delimitations, the study holds significant implications. Findings aim to inform policymakers, educators, and stakeholders about the challenges faced by CwSNs in accessing inclusive education, guiding the targeted interventions

and policies. Moreover, the insights gained from this study can contribute to the existing body of knowledge and may serve as a foundation for future research on inclusive education.

CONCLUSION

Inclusive education is one of the best educational initiatives for bridging the socio-cultural gaps among the learners. Education is a powerful key that can open up many avenues. Inclusive policy should be implemented effectively with sensitivity. When parents, teachers and all stakeholders are properly informed about IE the dream of making educational space more inclusive can be materialised. Infrastructure issues, zero-rejection policy, availability of resource teachers, and IEP for CwSNs should receive special attention. In a developing nation like India with huge diversities, inclusive education needs to have prime focus in both policy and in practice.

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