

The Concept of Disability Reflected in the Textbooks of Jammu and Kashmir Board of School Education

Hilal Ahmad Wani*

Abstract

Disability denotes the challenges faced by individuals with impairments due to certain limitations, hindering their equal participation in society compared to those without impairments. In the pursuit of empowering persons with disabilities, India introduced The Rights of Persons with Disabilities (RPwD) Act, 2016, replacing the Persons with Disability Act, 1995, shifting the focus from charity-oriented approaches to rights-based initiatives. It guarantees equal opportunities, prohibits discrimination, mandates reasonable accommodations, ensures accessibility, advocates inclusive education, reserves employment opportunities, and offers social security benefits, thereby fostering their active engagement in society. Specifically, addressing education, the RPwD Act, 2016 emphasises inclusive schooling, reasonable accommodations, and equal opportunities for individuals with disabilities. This includes ensuring accessible infrastructure, adapting learning materials, providing specialised support, and training educators to facilitate an inclusive learning environment. For creating an inclusive learning environment, comprehensive integration of the disability concept into textbooks gains paramount importance. This article assesses the integration of disability-related content in primary level textbooks sanctioned by the Jammu and Kashmir Board of School Education (JKBOSE). The study examined JKBOSE textbooks from Class I–V, revealing that while NCERT—adapted books show some inclusivity, JKBOSE-prepared textbooks lack a comprehensive representation of the disability concept. This analysis underscores the need for further enhancements in disability portrayal within educational materials, striving for a more inclusive educational landscape.

*Teacher, Government High School Kondabal Ganderbal, Jammu & Kashmir

UNDERSTANDING DISABILITY

According to the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016

“Person with a disability” means a person with long term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairment which, in interaction with barriers, hinders his full and effective participation in society equally with others.

“Barrier” means any factor including communicational, cultural, economic, environmental, institutional, political, social, attitudinal or structural factors which hampers the full and effective participation of persons with disabilities in society.

This definition clearly states that disability is impairment in interacting with barriers, acknowledging its presence within both biological and social spheres. Disability as a concept can fluctuate over time, either improving or worsening further. Additionally, how they engage with their environment is greatly influenced by societal attitudes and behaviors towards them. In RPwD Act 2016, the number of disabilities was increased from seven to twenty one.

The Act Covers the Following Disabilities

1. Locomotor Disability
2. Leprosy Cured Person
3. Cerebral Palsy
4. Dwarfism
5. Muscular Dystrophy
6. Acid Attack Victims

7. Blindness
8. Low-vision
9. Deaf
10. Hard of Hearing
11. Speech and Language Disability
12. Intellectual Disability
13. Specific Learning Disabilities
14. Autism Spectrum Disorder
15. Mental Illness
16. Multiple Sclerosis
17. Parkinson’s Disease
18. Haemophilia
19. Thalassemia
20. Sickle Cell Disease
21. Multiple Disabilities

In the field of education, the objective of the act is to promote inclusive educational practices, cultivate a supportive atmosphere, and eliminate barriers to enable comprehensive development among students with disabilities. Students without disabilities need to develop empathy, resolving conflicts by understanding diverse perspectives and needs, without condescension but as an inherent right for everyone. Establishing positive relationships between students with and without disabilities is crucial for their mutual learning and enjoyment. These values should be integral to the school environment, fostering the holistic development of all students.

INCLUSION IN TEXTBOOKS

Textbooks comprise textual information, visuals like pictures, interactive activities, exercises, and guidance for teachers, ensuring a

multifaceted learning experience. At the primary level, they are designed with vibrant colours, abundant visuals, and interactive activities aimed at captivating and engaging young learners. In our schools, textbooks serve as the primary source of information for students, guiding their learning and understanding of a subject. Children enjoy looking at pictures in their textbooks and engaging in discussions about stories with both their peers and parents. Thus, they should embrace inclusivity to develop a positive attitude among students towards disability and raise awareness about disability and the rights of individuals with disabilities. The integration of the concept of disability into textbooks serves several crucial purposes:

Fostering Resilience and Aspiration

It aims to nurture resilience among students with disabilities, inspiring them to dream big and achieve their full potential. Chapters dedicated to success stories and accomplishments of individuals with disabilities, especially in language subjects, would be instrumental in achieving this objective.

Promoting Inclusivity

An inclusive society embraces everyone, and textbooks can reflect this ethos by featuring images, activities, and exercises that represent diversity. Children with disabilities need to see

themselves in textbooks, facilitating their connection with every learning activity in school.

Cultivating Good Values and Preventing Bullying

Textbooks play a pivotal role in shaping students into compassionate individuals. They should instill values of empathy, kindness, and respect for diversity. Students need to comprehend their responsibilities, foster mutual respect, and understand both their own and others’ strengths and needs, thereby discouraging bullying both within and outside the school environment.

Raising Awareness

Textbooks can serve as a platform to educate students about the rights of individuals with disabilities, fostering awareness and understanding of the challenges they face.

Examining Disability Inclusion in the Textbooks

Table 1

Class	I and II
Disability Reflected in the Textbook	NIL

Most of the pages of the textbooks of Class I and Class II are filled with beautiful pictures but not a single picture shows anything related to the concept of disability or includes any person with disability. Pictures in textbooks of mathematics have more space to address the concept of disability than the pictures in

textbooks of English. At this stage, emphasis is primarily placed on fostering reading, writing, and numeracy skills, leaving little room to address disability-related aspects. Nonetheless, acknowledging socio-emotional development and promoting inclusive education is equally vital for students' holistic development, alongside other domains.

Table 2

Class	III
Subject	English (Chant –III)
Chapter	Smile Please
Name of the Disability	Locomotor Disability
Name of the Character	Shayaan
Theme of the Chapter	Resilience

This chapter reflects inclusiveness through pictures of Shayaan walking with the help of crutches. Explanation of the disability concept can be integrated into this chapter, but both the introductory instructions and the concluding exercises overlooked a significant opportunity to discuss the concept of disability and address Shayaan's rights, leaving out these crucial aspects altogether.

Table 3

Class	III
Subject	EVS
Chapter	Sharing Our Feelings
Name of the Disability	Blindness Problems faced by Old People

Name of the Character	Ravi Bhaiya—A teacher in a college
Theme of the Chapter	Disability does not stop a person from completing his/her work effectively and contributing to society.

This chapter is devoted to individuals with disabilities, addressing the challenges encountered by older individuals, such as back pain, hearing impairment, and low vision. It features a college teacher who is blind, effectively imparting knowledge and garnering admiration and respect from his students. The chapter delves into fostering friendships with individuals with disabilities, understanding their needs, and nurturing a positive attitude towards them. Furthermore, it includes exercises and activities centered around the concept of disability.

Table 4

Class	IV
Subject	English (Tulip Series Book–IV)
Chapter	Poem—The Blind Boy
Name of the Disability	Blindness
Name of the Character	Poet—a Blind Boy
Theme of the Chapter	Appreciate what you have and don't let the absence of something overshadow your happiness.

The poem describes the blind boy's sensory experiences, emphasising his ability to appreciate the beauty of nature through his other senses. Despite his blindness, he remains cheerful and content, finding joy in the world around him. JKBOSE is replacing the Tulip Series with the Chant Series for the subject English. Already Chant – I, Chant – II, and Chant – III are taught in schools. The concept of disability might not receive adequate focus in the Chant Series, similar to how other language textbooks prepared by JKBOSE lack sufficient attention to this topic.

Table 5

Class	IV
Subject	EVS
Chapter	Chuskit Goes to School
Name of the Disability	Locomotor Disability
Name of the Character	Chuskit – A ten years old girl who wants to go to school
Theme of the Chapter	Together with a little support, we can bring differently abled children to our schools

The chapter focuses on the difficulties faced by a ten-years-old girl who can't use her legs to access education like other children. It emphasises the importance of overcoming physical barriers through support systems like wheelchairs, ramps, and strong support from peers and authorities. Additionally, it highlights the crucial need for

the right to education, fostering positive attitudes, and initiating essential support for individuals with disabilities. This chapter stands out as a remarkable piece, encompassing various dimensions and aspects of disability in a beautifully comprehensive manner. Remarkably comprehensive, this chapter encompasses diverse dimensions of disability. Yet, its positioning at the end of the book diminishes its potential impact. Given its connection to Chapter 1, "Going to School," it would be more beneficial for students to position it after Chapter 1 as Chapter 2 in the book.

Table 6

Class	V
Subject	English
Chapter	The Man Who Empowered the Blind
Name of the Disability	Blindness
Name of the Character	Louis Braille
Theme of the Chapter	Success story and hard work of a person with disability and his contribution to the society

This chapter highlights the remarkable dedication of Louis Braille, who, despite being visually impaired, made an extraordinary impact on the lives of individuals with visual disabilities through the creation of the Braille system an innovation that empowered the blind

to read and write. The Teacher's Page at the end of the chapter suggests organising a school trip to a blind school. Additionally, it provides instructions on developing a positive attitude among students towards visually impaired individuals and offers helpful guidelines on using the Braille system for reading. This chapter also raises awareness among students that children who cannot see are capable of learning to read and write through the Braille system.

Table 7

Class	V
Subject	EVS
Chapter	Like Father, Like Daughter
Name of the Disability	Locomotor Disability- Polio
Name of the Character	Satti
Theme of the Chapter	Traits that children get from parents

In this book, only a segment of a chapter touches on the concept of disability. This chapter provides awareness regarding the traits that children share with their parents. Towards the end of this chapter, a character named Satti, who had polio, is introduced. Some people discouraged her from having children, fearing that her offspring might inherit the same disability. However, the doctor reassured her by dispelling this unfounded belief.

Table 8

Class	V
Subject	Mathematics
Chapter	How Big? How Heavy?
Name of the Disability	Blindness
Name of the Character	Shahid
Theme of the Chapter	Big and Heavy Concept

This serves as a wonderful illustration of how textbooks can adeptly integrate the notion of disability. Shahid, despite his inability to see, possesses an exceptional sense of touch, surpassing that of many individuals. He navigates tasks in his unique way. Rather than being labeled as disabled, Shahid is rightly recognised as differently abled, highlighting his unique strengths and abilities.

CHART 1: DISABILITIES ADDRESSED IN THE TEXTBOOKS

Type of Disabilities Mentioned in the Textbooks of Jammu and Kashmir from Classes I-V

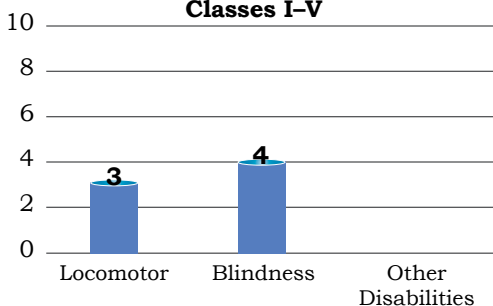
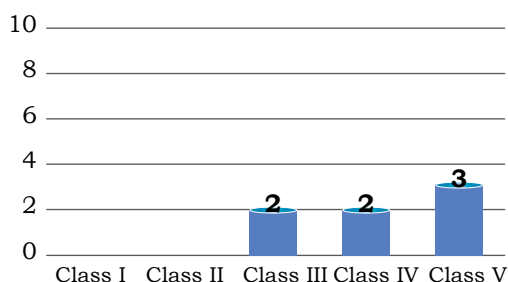


CHART 2: CLASS-WISE FREQUENCY OF DISABILITY CONCEPT

Number of Times Disabilities addressed in the Textbooks of Jammu and Kashmir from Classes I-V



The main books examined for disability inclusion comprise Chant series of English for Classes I-III, *Tulip Series of English* for Classes IV and V, *environmental studies* for Classes III-V and *Merry math series of mathematics* for Classes I-V. Additionally, other textbooks like the baharistani urdu series for Classes I-V, saras bharti hindi series for Classes I-V, and Kashmiri textbooks for Classes I-V are utilised in various regions across Jammu and Kashmir. However, their utilisation varies across these regions, and the representation of the disability concept doesn't uniformly reach all students due to the specific language learning divide. Remarkably, the concept of disability remains largely absent in most of these textbooks, with the exception being the Hindi textbook designed for Class V. This specific textbook includes chapters titled 'Aik Maa Ki Bebasī' and 'Jahan Chah Wahan Rah', which delve into the subject, providing insights into

this crucial concept. These chapters need to be translated for inclusion in all other language textbooks across the region. This is important to ensure that the concept of disability is uniformly understood by all children.

CONCLUSION

In most primary-level textbooks prepared by JKBOSE, there is a notable absence or very little coverage of the idea of disability and the rights associated with individuals who have disabilities. However, textbooks adapted from NCERT by JKBOSE, specifically *Environmental Studies* and *english*, do touch upon this concept to some extent. These inclusions effectively demonstrate the capabilities of individuals with disabilities, showcasing their potential to contribute to society while also addressing the necessary support they require to pursue their aspirations. However, there is a lack of emphasis on explaining the concept of disability and the associated rights of people with disabilities within these inclusions. Nevertheless, the representation of this concept remains quite limited to certain types of disabilities and lacks depth in various instances. Furthermore, it is evident that the portrayal and emphasis on the topic of disabilities in the pictures and activities within these textbooks, particularly in Class I and II, are not given significant attention and are often overlooked.

There's a critical need for our textbooks to comprehensively embrace inclusivity, serving as platforms to raise awareness and foster a deep understanding of disability concepts, the unique challenges individuals face, and their inherent rights. This goes beyond mere acknowledgment; textbooks should cultivate values, attitudes, and skills in young minds that promote compassion, reverence, assistance, and empathy towards individuals with disabilities.

Central to this effort is nurturing empathy among students without disabilities, encouraging them to connect with those facing challenges, offer support, and earnestly learn from their distinct perspectives and experiences. These reciprocal interactions significantly contribute to fostering solidarity, creating a more inclusive and supportive educational environment for all.

It's crucial to instill a sense of self-value and respect among children with disabilities, celebrating their inherent strengths. Educational content and activities within our schools should capture the richness of experiences of individuals with disabilities while articulating the necessary support they rightfully deserve. This inclusivity goes beyond providing special educators or arrangements; it requires broader understanding and acceptance.

By bridging gaps in understanding disabilities and nurturing empathy and inclusivity, these educational materials can pave the way for a more equitable future. Embracing diversity and nurturing a culture of acceptance and support within educational resources will not only enhance the learning journey but also significantly contribute to forging a fairer society for everyone.

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