

Comparative Analysis of the Enrollment of Individuals with Disabilities in General Schools in India

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Abstract- Education has undergone a major transformation globally from treating and secluding model to intervening and including individuals with disabilities in general schools. Research indicates that, when support extended from home, school and community, students with disability benefits from inclusive education. Society needs to be equipped with facilities to promote inclusion for accessing education and active community participation. Worldwide countries should lay down legal frameworks and educational policies to confer rights for individuals with disabilities. The International Convention of 2007 advocates rights-based educational provisions that include students with disabilities in general schools. Sustainable Development Goal 4 stresses the importance of learning in all phases of human life, promoting inclusivity at home, school, and in the community. Inclusive and equity-based quality education for people with disabilities is essential for sustainable development. The inclusive education landscape in India witnessed several legislations, policies and initiatives from time to time to meet the International treaty obligations. A close look of the legislations, policies and initiatives gives an understanding on India's efforts and commitment towards promoting inclusive education. The enrollment patterns of students with disabilities in general schools are contingent upon factors such as accessibility, adaptations, teaching accommodations, and support from families and communities to a greater extent. Examining the factors affecting the enrollment patterns of students with disabilities in general schools helps retention and access equity-based quality education. Higher enrollment is associated with greater potential for achieving academic and social success.

Keywords: enrollment patterns, comparative analysis, general schools, accessibility, equity-based quality education.

I. Introduction

'Disability' covers 'impairments, activity limitations, and participation restrictions' (WHO). The nature of disability is unique to each individual, depending on the physical, mental, intellectual, and sensory impairments. The familiar impacting factors that persons with disabilities experience are activity limitations at a personal level and participation restrictions at the societal level to access domains of daily living such as education and employment. Education for persons with disabilities has undergone a significant transformation globally, from treating and secluding models to intervening and including them in mainstream school. Disability was viewed earlier as a curse and a disease requiring medical attention for treatment, and the later period witnessed segregation and isolation of persons with disabilities in residential care homes or specialized institutions where personal care and needs were taken care of. There was a gradual shift in the attitude from the medical model towards the human rights approach, which was a significant breakthrough for persons with disabilities ('Universal Declaration of Human Rights,' 1948). Individuals with Disabilities are no longer seen as mere objects for receiving services. The development of inclusive education was led by several international and national moves that guided the course of measures to include children with disabilities from education to employment and independent living within the community.

Extensive research has proved that when support is extended from home, school and community, students with disabilities can benefit from inclusive education. Persons with disabilities, when included and educated in mainstream schools along with their peer group, can achieve better academic and social skills. School is regarded as the extension of home. Parental involvement in education is significant in supporting a child's learning at home. Teachers in mainstream schools have higher expectations of students, including children with disabilities. Inclusive education can reduce the stigma and prejudice associated with disability. It promotes understanding and acceptance among peers, and mirrors real-life inclusion.

Education for people with disabilities in general schools has gained momentum with global consensus among parents, educators, and people with disabilities. The United Nations has played a vital role in the process of transformation towards inclusive education through several international moves. Significant among them are 'The World Conference on Education for All' (1990, Thailand), 'The Salamanca Statement Framework for Action on Special Needs Education' (1994, Spain), 'The World Education Forum' (2000, Dakar), and 'The Biwako Millennium Framework for Action 2002.' Under the leadership of world educators, standard rules on equalizing opportunities were set at three levels to ensure the participation of people with disabilities was at par with others. The governments were primarily advised to sensitize the public of rights, needs, and their potential contributions; second, to create safe and accessible physical environments in integrated settings, and to use information and communication technology in education, gainful employment, and community participation. Third, governments are advised to promote research to facilitate a comprehensive understanding of all aspects of persons with disabilities. Standardized rules on equalizing opportunities for people with disabilities later culminated in the Convention on the 'Rights of Persons with Disabilities' (2007).

The United Nations 'Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities' (CRPD) recognizes education as a fundamental right adopted from the 'Human Rights Declaration' of 1948. All humans, irrespective of their abilities, need access to education, and it is the right of individuals with disabilities to be included in general schools at all levels. Emphasis was placed on the core principle of non-discrimination of persons on a disability basis for enrollment in general schools. General schools need to be equipped with resources to accommodate the varied learning needs of students with disabilities. To promote inclusive education, individuals with disabilities must be included in the decision-making process of legislation and policy-related matters. Worldwide countries should lay down legal frameworks and educational policies to confer rights for individuals with disabilities. The convention has been instrumental in promoting global advocacy and fostering collaborations between governments, organizations, and individuals to work towards inclusive, equity-based quality education for students with disabilities. Consequently, countries have updated their laws and policies to enroll children with disabilities and allocate adequate resources in areas of improvement, such as infrastructure development and professional training of teachers tailored to their specific local conditions specific to a country. The Convention Committee facilitates and monitors the progress made by member countries. It also addresses specific challenges and offers solutions through collaborations.

The United Nation's member countries adopt sustainable development goals to ensure human well-being on the planet. The sustainable development goals provide a framework for the governments of member countries and their citizens towards inclusive and equitable sustainable development. The Agenda 2030 sustainable development goals address poverty, hunger, access to education for all, environment, employment, etc. Inclusive and equitable education for persons with disabilities is essential to sustainable development. The United Nations' Sustainable Development Goal-4 (SDG) on 'Quality Education' is a crucial component of sustainable development. It is interconnected with several other sustainable development goals, addressing poverty, health, employment, etc... These multi-sectorial collaborations make sustainable development more inclusive and equitable.

The Convention recommends updating educational policies and promoting the full inclusion of students with disabilities in general schools. Periodic reviews by the convention committee on enrollment, retention, and investing to improve infrastructure and develop professional training modules are conducted for all member countries.

II. Enrolment is the starting point for promoting inclusive education in mainstream schools.

In the present context, 'enrolment' refers to enrolling a person with a disability in a general school. The enrolment patterns of persons with disabilities in general schools are contingent upon factors such as accessibility, adaptations, teaching accommodations and support from families and community to a greater extent. Examining the factors affecting enrolment patterns helps in retention and in making necessary provisions to access education for children with disabilities. Higher enrolment is associated with more significant academic and social success potential.

Studying the enrolment patterns of persons with disabilities in general schools is essential for promoting inclusive education. Understanding enrolment patterns helps identify disparities and barriers to achieving inclusive, equitable, quality education for persons with disabilities in general schools. Analyzing the enrolment patterns helps understand potential legal and human rights violations, such as the right to equal educational opportunities, as enshrined in various national and international laws and treaties. Enrolment patterns give an outlook on the provision of adequate resources. Inadequate resources infringe upon students' rights to receive an appropriate education and reasonable accommodations as required by law. If an enrolment pattern reveals that students with disabilities are segregated instead of integrating into mainstream classrooms, it may indicate a violation of their right to inclusive education.

By studying enrolment patterns, researchers can provide evidence-based and data-driven suggestions for policymakers to make adequate provisions to access education for children with disabilities in general schools. Adequate resource allocation can be made to meet the needs of students with disabilities. It helps in the retention of students to access equitable and quality education. Examining the enrolment patterns gives a glimpse into the unique needs of learning styles, and interventions can be tailored to suit the needs of a student with a disability. Presenting enrolment patterns to the community members and other stakeholders of mainstream schools can lead to constructive discussions and mobilization of community resources to support students with disabilities. Examining enrolment patterns serves as a starting point for planning long-term goals on educational outcomes.

Higher enrolment of persons with disabilities in general schools can help clear the misconceptions about inclusive education for persons with disabilities. Eventually, it can lead to improved learning outcomes. It promotes lifelong learning opportunities. An increase in the enrolment rate leads to better literacy rates. Higher enrolment can showcase strategies used to promote inclusive education. These strategies can be shared with member countries for effective implementation of inclusive education. These successful strategies could be replicated in other member countries with similar goals towards inclusive, equitable and quality education for persons with disabilities.

Peer group support through study partnerships, buddy systems, peer mentoring, and cooperative learning groups promotes positive social interactions and enhanced academic achievement. The peer group needs to be given orientation and guidance to support students with disabilities. A trained teacher sets clear expectations, monitors performance, uses effective teaching and reinforcement strategies, and uses appropriate teaching material for better learning outcomes for children with disabilities.

III. Global school enrolment patterns of persons with disabilities

Developed countries such as the USA, UK, and Australia have legislation and policies updated for inclusive education in general schools and classes. The proportion of public schools is notably high in these countries. These countries have seen a rise in the enrolment of children with disabilities in general schools with continued efforts over the years. These countries have ongoing research activities on school retention and improving quality education with innovative strategies. Despite solid legislation and

policies, many developing countries need more financial resources, untrained professionals, poor infrastructure and cultural beliefs affecting the enrolment of children in mainstream schools and classrooms.

IV. Indian Scenario

Indian culture from ancient times has imbibed the philosophy of inclusive education wherein persons with disabilities were provided instruction in an inclusive environment. Under colonial rule, the education system in India underwent many changes. The impact of colonialism has resulted in social and economic disparities and human rights violations, undermining the education of individuals with disabilities. The post-independence period in India witnessed several committees on education, and suggestions for integrated education for individuals with disabilities were made.

The development of an inclusive education system depends on a country's socioeconomic and educational policies. The inclusive education policy agenda calls for affirmative action at the government and societal levels. The Indian Constitution (1950) included most rights from the 'Human Rights Declaration Articles' in its Fundamental Rights (Part III) and the Directive Principles of State Policy (Part IV). India has made tremendous efforts to bring forth the necessary constitutional amendments and legislation, policies, and schemes to promote inclusive education for individuals with disabilities. The succession of measures taken by the Government of India has set the pace from a state of segregated rehabilitation services to moving towards inclusive education for persons with disabilities.

V. Policies, Legislations and aligned initiatives

Several national-level educational policies have changed the educational landscape of India. Significant among them was the 1986 education policy, which introduced the universalization of elementary education for children, ensuring that all children aged 6-14 years had access to free and compulsory education. The policy reforms also included the concepts of "special education" and "inclusive education" for students with disabilities in general schools. The policy reforms aligned with the 'Education for all' goal of educating persons with disabilities in general schools. India launched 'Integrated Education for Disabled Children' during the year 1994 to integrate children with disabilities in general schools. The enrolled children were provided with required assistive devices and financial support through scholarships. Teachers were given training on teaching methods to accommodate students with disabilities. Ramps were provided for increased accessibility. The IEDC program did not yield proper results due to a lack of sensitization programs and trained teachers on disability issues.

The Rehabilitation Council was set up with the 'Rehabilitation Council of India (RCI) Act', of 1992 with the purpose of regulating and monitoring services given to persons with disabilities. It also aims at developing course content to train the workforce. It certifies trained professionals from multiple disciplines, such as special educators, speech therapists, vocational counselors, rehabilitation psychologists, etc. The Rehabilitation Council of India (RCI) maintains a registry of certified professionals in disability rehabilitation for human resource development and to maintain the standards of trained personnel.

The 1995 act on disabilities ensures 'equal opportunities, full participation' and provisions for support services for students with disabilities in general schools.

The national initiatives of Sarva Shiksha Abhiyaan in 2001 focused on education including persons with disabilities in general schools. The program incorporated a rejection policy and no denial of admission in general schools based on disability concerns. The program ensured every child received eight years of schooling under the Universalization of Elementary program. The Sarva Shiksha Abhiyaan program focused on identifying children with disabilities in local communities and enrolling them in nearby general schools. All students who dropped out were brought back to school. This eventually led to a need to equip schools at the secondary level to meet the requirements of children with disabilities by providing aids and appliances, special teacher recruitment, and physical and curriculum modifications for greater accessibility. The Sarva Shiksha Abhiyaan programme provisions were later incorporated into the 'Right to Education Act,' 2009, which mandates elementary education as a fundamental right for children between 6-14 years old. According to this act, schools are required to make access to students with disabilities and take appropriate measures to strengthen their education through support services.

The enrolment pattern reported during the implementation period of National Education Policy 1986 was gradual and varied across different states. The enrolment rate was low due to a lack of accessible infrastructure and inadequate teacher training. However, the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyaan program implementation has seen increased enrolment rates in primary and upper primary schools. The 'Right to Education Act', 2009 improved access to education for persons with disabilities in general schools.

India enacted 'Rights of persons with Disabilities Act, 2016 in line with the international convention of 2007. This Act has provisions that support inclusive education, where students with and without disabilities learn together with reasonable accommodations and support services. A person with a benchmark disability can be educated in a general school. Based on the human rights approach, the present Act included 21 disabilities and advocates for full inclusion in general schools.

The updated National Education Policy 2020 reformed education in India. National Educational Policy 2020 focuses on providing a comprehensive framework at all levels of education. NEP 2020 ensures participation of children with disabilities from early childhood to higher education. Aligning with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 2030, the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyaan program was modified as Samagra Shiksha Abhiyaan under three components, namely Sarva Shiksha Abhiyaan-The SSA program supports inclusive education at the primary school level; the Rastriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyaan-RMSA program promotes inclusive education at the secondary level and Teacher Education to promote and facilitate equal opportunities and equitable learning outcomes.

The Global Education Monitoring (GEM) report by UNESCO focuses on education in member countries in general and inclusive education in specific. Global Education Monitoring (GEM) report is generated by referring to the findings from member countries' Annual Status of Education Report. The Global Education Monitoring report on inclusive education in India provided an account of the physical and attitudinal barriers faced by children with disabilities. The Global Education Monitoring report

observes the disparities between rural and urban areas regarding infrastructure, trained teachers and teaching resources; rural regions lag distinctly. The Global Education Monitoring report, while commending India's strong policies to promote inclusive education implementation at the gross root level, remains a significant concern. The Global Education Monitoring report recommendations for India are strengthening policies to promote inclusive education at the gross root level, enhancing teacher training, improving infrastructure and addressing socio-cultural barriers to promote inclusive education. On the other hand, the World Bank provides financial assistance, organizes capacity-building programs for policymakers, sponsors research on inclusive education, and collaborates with NGOs working in disabilities and inclusive education.

VI. Enrolment and Literacy rate for persons with disabilities in India

The enrolment rate represents the percentage of persons with disabilities enrolled in educational institutions. The enrolment rate is connected with the literacy rate. Higher enrollment is associated with greater potential to achieve academic and social success, leading to improved literacy rates. The nationwide literacy rate for individuals with disabilities in general schools is reported to be very low compared to that of the general population. According to the 2011 census data, the literacy rate for persons with disabilities was around 54 per cent compared with the overall literacy rate of the population, which was approximately 74 per cent. Some factors contributing to the low enrolment rate include a lack of accessible infrastructure, social stigmas, and lack of trained teachers and resources to provide quality-based education to students with disabilities.

VII. Statistics on Gross Enrolment Ratio

Globally, the gross enrolment ratio for persons with disabilities in mainstream schools varies for each country. According to the UNESCO Global Education Monitoring Report in 2020, the worldwide average gross enrolment ratio for primary education was estimated to be around 58 per cent. This indicates that a most of the children with disabilities across the world do not have access to inclusive education and still face barriers, and those barriers need to be addressed. The gross enrolment ratio for persons with disabilities in mainstream schools during the 90s was meager when compared with the general population. The reasons attributed to the low gross enrolment ratio were limited infrastructure for accessibility, lack of trained teachers, societal geographical barriers and so on. With continued efforts over the years, India succeeded in Universalizing primary education, including children with disabilities, by enforcing solid legislation and educational policies to meet the goal. According to the data from the Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities, Government of India, the gross enrolment ratio for persons with disabilities in 2019-20 was around 79.65 per cent. However, this figure can vary widely depending on the type and severity of disabilities.

VIII. National initiatives to promote enrollment of children with disabilities in general schools

Integrated Child Development Services (ICDs) aims to improve children's and mothers' health, nutrition and education during the foundational years of child development. At-risk children are identified, appropriate referrals are made to lower the impact of impairment through early interventions, and training is provided on developing school readiness skills.

The Rights of Persons with disabilities act 2016 mandates that appropriate state governments should take measures to promote inclusive education. Significant among them are conducting surveys to identify persons with disabilities to collect data on disabilities and to improve the enrolment rates, recruitment of special educators to support students with disabilities in mainstream schools through reasonable accommodations and establishing resource centers to help at all levels of school education. The 'Rights of Persons with disabilities act' 2016 mandates the state governments should take measures to promote inclusive education. Schools should facilitate communication during the learning process through the use of augmentative and alternative modes for students with disabilities.

IX. Integrating technology for better outcomes

Integrating technology is essential to improve accessibility, inclusivity, and learning outcomes for students with disabilities in general schools. Some of the technology-based solutions include promoting the use of assistive devices and software in accessible formats, telemedicine and mental health services, and accessing online education platforms for e-learning, which includes videos, books and so on.

National policies on disabilities focus on prevention, early identification and early intervention and rehabilitation of persons with identified disabilities. The school education department developed PRASHAST, a school screening checklist. This checklist enables regular classroom teachers to screen at-risk children and refer them for further identification. The PRASHAST checklist contains items to screen for all the 21 disabilities listed in the Rights of Persons with disabilities act, 2016. Administering this checklist at the school level not only helps in the early identification of children with disabilities but also gives a count on various aspects of enrolment, such as dropouts required support for retention with appropriate accommodations.

The Government of India's Unique Disability Identification (UDID) program assigns a unique disability identification number to each person with a disability. The unique ID facilitates access to various services, government schemes, and reservations for disabled persons. The UDID empowers persons with disabilities to participate in societal activities, access education, health care services, etc. Persons with disabilities can access government services from gross root village, block, district, state, and national levels.

Accessibility to education is crucial for increasing the enrollment of students with disabilities in general schools. Accessible India Campaign (Sugamya Bharat) is a Government of India initiative to achieve universal access to persons with disabilities. This includes improving accessibility to built-in environments such as schools, hospitals, parks, etc., transport facilities such as

surfaces, steps and ramps, parking... and public information in usable formats such as audio, captioning and sign language interpretation...

Unified District Information System for Education (UDISE), a government database to maintain data related to school education, including information about persons with disabilities. UDSIE maintains data related to school education, including information about students with disabilities. Information on the type of school, whether public or private, geographical distribution, accessibility and facilities available, and number of students with disabilities enrolled by variety of disability, gender, and grades is updated periodically. The enrolment data obtained from the official Unified District Information System for Education (UDISE) helps the policymakers update the policies and allocate resources as needed.

In a recent study on enabling digital technologies for persons with disabilities, administrators, teachers, and students with disabilities were asked to express their views on questions relating to the use of digital technology to facilitate inclusive education. Most respondents expressed that integrating digital technology into classrooms improves learning outcomes for persons with disabilities. Digital technology can help in administration, teaching, creating safe learning environments and facilitating families and community participation (Lella SK & Dr. Chary BB, 2023 National seminar presentation- yet to be published).

X. Conclusion:

Inclusive education is an evolving field with significant developments in several dimensions. Some of them include the human rights approach, updating legislation and policies, fostering international collaborations, and disseminating knowledge and practice. Higher enrollment is associated with greater potential for achieving academic and social success. There is much scope for future research on topics related to universal design for learning principles in classrooms, integration of assistive technology in inclusive classrooms, the impact on learning outcomes for persons with disabilities, continued professional development for teachers, social and emotional learning for persons with disabilities, collaboration between schools and families, promotion of inclusive higher education, and culture sensitivity studies.

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