



TEACHERS' AWARENESS AND ADAPTATIONS FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

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Abstract

Education is a fundamental right and a powerful tool for social transformation, particularly for marginalized groups such as persons with disabilities (PWDs). In India, despite constitutional provisions and legislative frameworks aimed at promoting inclusive education, students with disabilities (SWDs) continue to face significant barriers in accessing quality education. Teachers play a pivotal role in the successful implementation of inclusive education, yet their awareness, teaching adaptations, and perceptions towards SWDs remain underexplored. This study aims to fill this gap by examining the current state of teachers' awareness, teaching adaptations, and perceptions towards SWDs in government schools in Hyderabad, India. Using a descriptive research design, data were collected from 96 teachers across 60 government schools through a structured questionnaire. The findings reveal significant gaps in teachers' awareness and adaptation of inclusive teaching practices. Only 8.34% of teachers demonstrated a high level of awareness, while 70.83% reported low awareness. Similarly, none of the teachers reported a high level of teaching adaptations, with 83% showing low adaptation levels. Furthermore, 87.5% of teachers exhibited negative or indifferent perceptions towards SWDs. The study underscores the urgent need for comprehensive teacher training programs and policy interventions to foster inclusive education and address the barriers faced by SWDs in mainstream schools.

Keywords: *Inclusive Education, Students with Disabilities, Teacher Awareness, Teaching Adaptations, Teacher Perceptions*

INTRODUCTION

Education is a fundamental human right and a powerful tool for social transformation, capable of breaking the cycle of poverty, fostering economic growth, and promoting social inclusion. However, for students with disabilities, access to quality education remains a significant challenge, particularly in developing countries like India. Despite legislative frameworks and policy initiatives aimed at promoting inclusive education, students with disabilities continue to face barriers that hinder their full participation in the educational system. This paper explores the awareness and adaptations made by teachers to support students with disabilities in India, focusing on the challenges and opportunities within the school education system.

Background of the Problem

India, often referred to as the "Land of Varieties," is a multicultural, multiethnic, and multi-linguistic society where people of diverse religions, castes, classes, genders, and abilities coexist. As a democratic nation, India is committed to ensuring equality and social justice for all its citizens. However, marginalized groups, including persons with disabilities (Divyangjan), have historically faced discrimination and exclusion, resulting in their socioeconomic and educational marginalization. According to the 2011 Census, 2.21% of India's population lives with disabilities, a figure that has been steadily increasing due to factors such as population growth, aging, accidents, and advancements in medical care. Despite this growing population, persons with disabilities continue to encounter significant barriers in accessing education, healthcare, and employment opportunities.

Education is widely recognized as a critical driver of social and economic development. For students with disabilities, education is not only a means of acquiring knowledge and skills but also a pathway to empowerment, self-reliance, and social inclusion. However, the participation of students with disabilities in India's education system remains disproportionately low. While the Government of India has introduced various policies and programs to promote inclusive education, such as the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act (2016) and the Right to Education Act (2009), the implementation of these initiatives has been inconsistent. Teachers, as key stakeholders in the education system, play a pivotal role in ensuring the success of inclusive education. Their awareness, attitudes, and ability to adapt teaching methods to meet the diverse needs of students with disabilities are critical factors in creating an inclusive learning environment.



Concept of Disability

Disability is a complex and multifaceted concept that encompasses a wide range of physical, sensory, intellectual, and mental health conditions. The World Health Organization (WHO) defines disability as an umbrella term covering impairments, activity limitations, and participation restrictions. Over the years, the understanding of disability has evolved from a medical model, which views disability as a problem within the individual, to a social model, which emphasizes the role of societal barriers in disabling individuals. In India, the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act (2016) recognizes 21 types of disabilities, including physical, sensory, intellectual, and mental health conditions. This expanded definition reflects a more inclusive approach to disability, aligning with international standards and promoting the rights and dignity of persons with disabilities.

Constitutional Provisions and Legal Framework

The Constitution of India guarantees equality, justice, and fundamental rights to all citizens, including persons with disabilities. Articles 14, 15, and 16 ensure equality before the law, prohibit discrimination, and provide equal opportunities in employment and education. Additionally, Article 46 mandates free and compulsory education for children with disabilities up to the age of 18. The Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act (2016) is a landmark legislation that reinforces these constitutional provisions by mandating inclusive education, barrier-free access, and reasonable accommodations for students with disabilities. Despite these legal safeguards, the implementation of inclusive education remains a challenge, particularly in rural and underserved areas.

School Education in India

India's school education system has undergone significant transformations since independence, with various commissions and policies shaping its evolution. The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 marks a paradigm shift in India's approach to education, emphasizing inclusivity, equity, and quality. The policy recognizes the diverse needs of students with disabilities and calls for the development of inclusive curricula, teacher training programs, and support systems to ensure their full participation in the education system. However, the success of these initiatives depends on the awareness and preparedness of teachers to adapt their teaching practices to meet the needs of students with disabilities.

Education and Students with Disabilities

Despite progressive policies, the educational status of students with disabilities in India remains concerning. According to the 2011 Census, only 55% of persons with disabilities are literate, with significant disparities between urban and rural areas and between genders. The enrollment of students with disabilities in schools is low, and dropout rates are high, particularly at the secondary level. Barriers such as inaccessible infrastructure, lack of trained teachers, and societal stigma continue to hinder the educational progress of students with disabilities. Addressing these challenges requires a concerted effort from all stakeholders, including policymakers, educators, and communities.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature on inclusive education in India highlights the challenges faced by SWDs, including infrastructural limitations, lack of specialized support, and societal stigma (Dey, Naru, & Bika, 2023). Previous studies have shown that teachers often hold deficit-oriented perspectives towards SWDs and lack the necessary training to address their diverse learning needs (Taneja-Johansson, Singal, & Samson, 2021). While the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 emphasizes the importance of inclusive education, the implementation of these policies remains inconsistent (Srivastava, de Boer, & Pijl, 2017). This study builds on existing research by focusing on teachers' awareness, teaching adaptations, and perceptions, which are critical for the successful inclusion of SWDs in mainstream schools.

RATIONALE OF THE STUDY

This study is motivated by the need to understand the role of teachers in promoting inclusive education for students with disabilities. While existing research has highlighted the challenges faced by students with disabilities in accessing education, there is limited evidence on the awareness and adaptations made by teachers to support these students. By examining the perspectives and practices of teachers, this study aims to identify gaps in the implementation of inclusive education policies and provide recommendations for strengthening the capacity of teachers to meet the diverse needs of students with disabilities. The findings of this study will contribute to the ongoing efforts to create an inclusive and equitable education system in India, in line with the vision of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

- To assess the level of awareness among teachers regarding the special needs of SWDs.
- To examine the extent to which teachers adapt their teaching methods to accommodate SWDs.
- To explore teachers' perceptions towards SWDs in mainstream schools.

DELIMITATION OF THE STUDY

- The study is confined to government primary and secondary schools in Hyderabad, India.
- It focuses on teachers' awareness, teaching adaptations, and perceptions towards SWDs with visual, hearing, speech, and orthopedic disabilities.
- The study is limited to Government Urdu-medium schools.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

6.1 Research Method: A descriptive research design was employed to explore teachers' awareness, teaching adaptations, and perceptions towards SWDs.

6.2 Sample & Sampling: A sample of 96 teachers from 60 government primary and secondary schools in Hyderabad was selected using simple random sampling.

6.3 Tool: A structured questionnaire consisting of 40 items was developed to collect data. The questionnaire was divided into four domains: general information, awareness of disabilities, teaching adaptations, and perceptions towards SWDs. The tool was administered individually. The data was collected from the teachers of the schools.

6.4 Statistical Technique: Descriptive statistics were used to analyze the data, and the results are presented in percentages.

DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

To increase enrolments of SWDs in government schools, it is very necessary that the awareness, teaching methodology and perception of teachers should be positive and according to the needs of students. Therefore, a questionnaire was developed to study the teachers' awareness, teaching adaptations and perception towards Students with Disabilities. The responses are given in percentages.

Objective 1: To assess the level of awareness among teachers regarding the special needs of SWDs.

Awareness of disability and special needs of Students with Disabilities is very essential for teachers to fulfill the special needs of the SWDs. In this dimension there are 26 items to analyse the teacher's awareness. The responses have been calculated in percentage (See Table-1).

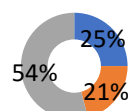
Table-1 : Teachers Awareness towards Special needs of Students with Disabilities

Sl. No	Levels	Frequency	Percentage %
1	High	24	25%
2	Moderate	20	21%
3	Low	52	54%
Total		96	100%

The data presented in Table 1 reflects teachers' awareness of the special needs of students with disabilities (SWD) in government schools. Among the 96 respondents, only **25%** reported having a *high* level of awareness, indicating that a quarter of the teachers possess a strong understanding of the needs of SWD. Additionally, **21%** of teachers demonstrated a *moderate* level of awareness, suggesting that while they have some knowledge, it may not be sufficient for effectively supporting SWD.

However, a significant majority (**54%**) of teachers reported a *low* level of awareness; highlighting a critical gap in understanding and addressing the educational needs of SWD. This lack of awareness can pose challenges in implementing inclusive teaching practices and ensuring equal learning opportunities for all students.

Teachers Awareness towards Special needs of SWDs



- To a greater extent
- To some extent
- Not at All

Figure 1: Teachers Awareness towards Special needs of SWDs

Objective 2: To examine the extent to which teachers adapt their teaching methods to accommodate SWDs. Teaching adoptions are very essential for teachers to fulfill the special needs of the SWDs. In this dimension there are 08 items to analyze the Teaching adoptions of teachers. The responses have been calculated in percentage (See Table 2).

Table-2: Teachers teaching adoptions towards Students with Disabilities

Sl. No	Levels	Frequency	Percentage %
1	High	00	0%
2	Moderate	16	17%
3	Low	80	83%
Total		96	100%

The data presented in Table 2 reflects the extent to which teachers adopt inclusive teaching strategies for students with disabilities (SWD) in government schools. Among the 96 respondents, none (0%) reported a *high* level of teaching adaptations, indicating that no teachers are fully integrating inclusive pedagogical practices into their teaching. Only 17% of teachers reported a *moderate* level of adaptation, suggesting that a small proportion of educators are making some efforts to accommodate SWD in their classrooms.

A significant majority (83%) of teachers reported a *low* level of teaching adaptations, highlighting a critical gap in inclusive teaching practices. This finding suggests that most teachers are not modifying their instructional approaches, classroom materials, or assessment methods to meet the diverse learning needs of SWD, which may hinder their academic progress and overall inclusion in the education system.

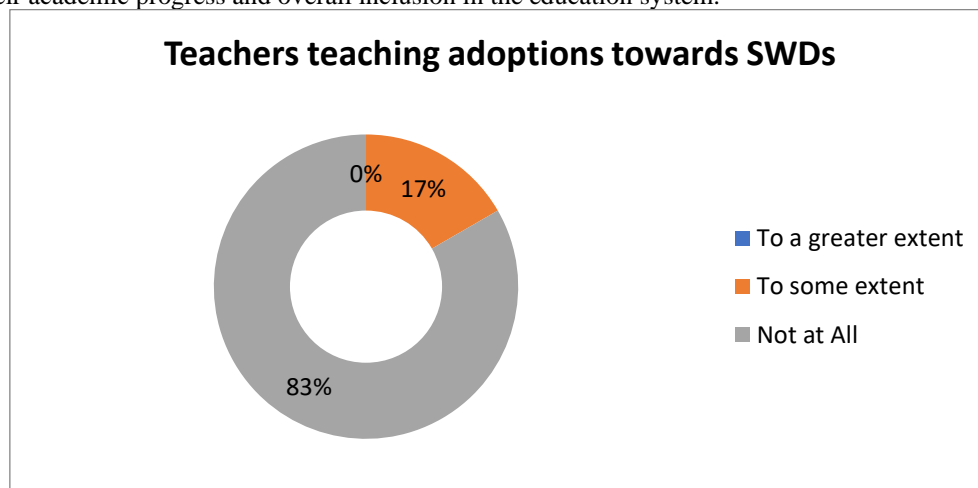


Figure 3.13: Teachers teaching adoptions towards Students with Disabilities

Objective 3: To explore teachers' perceptions towards SWDs in mainstream schools.

Teacher's perceptions are very essential for teachers to fulfill the special needs of the SWDs. In this dimension there are 06 items to analyse the perceptions of teachers. The responses have been calculated in percentage (See Table-3).

Table-3: Teachers perceptions towards Students with Disabilities

Sl. No	Levels	Frequency	Percentage %
1	High	04	4.16%
2	Moderate	08	8.34%
3	Low	84	87.5%
Total		96	100%

The data presented in Table 3.12 reflects teachers' perceptions towards students with disabilities (SWD) in government schools. Among the 96 respondents, only 4.16% reported having a *high* level of positive perception towards SWD, indicating that very few teachers fully acknowledge and support the inclusion of SWD in mainstream education. Additionally, 8.34% of teachers demonstrated a *moderate* perception, suggesting that while some teachers may be open to inclusive education, their understanding and acceptance of SWD remain limited.

A vast majority (87.5%) of teachers expressed a *low* perception towards SWD, highlighting a significant challenge in fostering an inclusive mindset among educators. Negative or indifferent perceptions can lead to barriers in effective teaching, classroom inclusivity, and the overall well-being of SWD. This finding underscores the need for awareness programs and attitude-changing interventions to create a more accepting and supportive school environment for students with special needs.

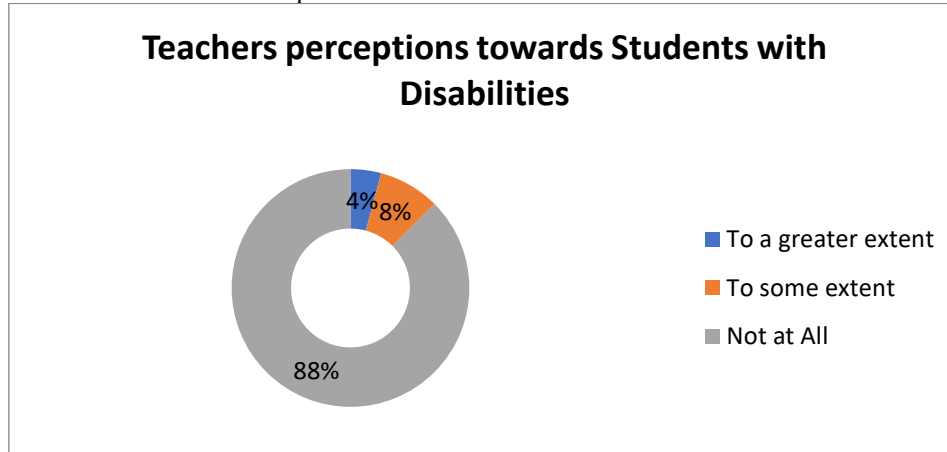


Figure 3.14: Teachers perceptions towards Students with Disabilities

RESULTS

The findings reveal significant gaps in teachers' awareness and adaptation of inclusive teaching practices. Only 8.34% of teachers demonstrated a high level of awareness, while 70.83% reported low awareness. Similarly, none of the teachers reported a high level of teaching adaptations, with 83% showing low adaptation levels. Furthermore, 87.5% of teachers exhibited negative or indifferent perceptions towards SWDs. These findings highlight the urgent need for comprehensive teacher training programs and policy interventions to foster inclusive education.

DISCUSSION

The results of this study align with previous research, which has consistently highlighted the challenges faced by SWDs in accessing quality education (Taneja-Johansson, Singal, & Samson, 2021). The low levels of awareness and teaching adaptations among teachers suggest that current training programs are inadequate in preparing educators to address the diverse needs of SWDs. Furthermore, the negative perceptions of teachers towards SWDs indicate a need for attitude-changing interventions to foster a more inclusive school environment.

CONCLUSION

This study underscores the critical role of teachers in the successful implementation of inclusive education. The findings reveal significant gaps in teachers' awareness, teaching adaptations, and perceptions towards SWDs, which hinder the effective inclusion of SWDs in mainstream schools. To address these challenges, comprehensive teacher training programs and policy interventions are urgently needed. Future research should explore the impact of such interventions on teachers' practices and the academic outcomes of SWDs.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **Teacher Training Programs:** Implement comprehensive training programs to enhance teachers' awareness and skills in inclusive education.
2. **Policy Interventions:** Strengthen policy frameworks to ensure the effective implementation of inclusive education practices.
3. **Awareness Campaigns:** Conduct awareness campaigns to change societal attitudes towards SWDs and promote inclusive education.
1. **Resource Allocation:** Allocate resources for the development of accessible infrastructure and specialized teaching materials for SWDs.

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