Inclusiveness of Specially-Abled Students in the Education System of India: Challenges, Resources, and Perspectives

- Mohammad Ashar Zaidi
  Course Name – Economics of Education
  Submitted to – Dr. Halima Sadia Rizvi

Introduction

According to UNICEF (United Nations Children's Fund) inclusive education is defined as education for all children in the same classroom in the same school. Opportunities are there for all the children to get educated including the groups which are usually excluded from such opportunities like specially-abled children, speakers of minority languages etc. Rights of Persons with Disabilities (RPWD) Act, 2016 defines inclusive education as - "a system of education wherein students with and without disability learn together and the system of teaching and learning is suitably adapted to meet the learning needs of different types of students with disabilities". What we understand from these definitions is that inclusive education is an education model where every student has an equal opportunity to learn and grow irrespective of his background. It aims to provide and environment which is fair and ensures that any kind of student diversity is celebrated and is not seen as a basis of discrimination.

Education helps individuals to know themselves and enables them to pursue their professional goals. Education is one of the fundamental drivers of the growth of human capital and these further effects the production capacity of an economy. Most of the economic growth models like Solow Growth model or the Romer Model state that sustained economic growth is only possible with development of new technologies which is a product of research and development which can only be achieved by educating the economy.

According to UNICEF there are around 240 million children with disabilities and if there is no inclusive education to provide equal and fair opportunities to these individuals, they will not only be able to improve their standards of living but at the same time led to slower economic growths and increase pressures on the economies.

Also, one of the important dimensions of sustainable development is inclusiveness in the overall growth process therefore in order to achieve sustainable development we need to focus on inclusive education as well.

In this paper, we aim to examine the current state of the Indian education system with a specific focus on determining its level of inclusiveness for specially-abled students. The purpose of this research is to evaluate whether educational institutions are equipped with the necessary resources, infrastructure, and trained personnel to accommodate and support the unique needs of these students. By investigating the accessibility and inclusivity measures in place, this study seeks to provide insights into the extent to which the

education system fosters an inclusive environment for all learners, regardless of physical or mental abilities.

Methodology

1. Research Design

This paper utilizes a quantitative approach to study the current state of Inclusiveness of specially-abled individuals in the education system of India. The primary data collection tool used is Google Forms which is used to prepare a structured questionnaire consisting of multiple-choice questions about the current of status of the facilities which are necessary to make educational institutions accessible to the specially-abled individuals and at the same time provide equal and fair educational environment and opportunities.

2. Sample Size and Considerations

The sample used consists of individuals currently involved in schools form classes 9th to 12th. All of them are from Delhi and I reached them out through a tuition centre named Concept Tutorials. Other than these I also used my personal and academic networks to reach out to different students which again resided in Delhi itself.

3. Making of the Questionnaire

The questionnaire consisted of only closed ended questions and all of them were multiple-choice. The reason behind this was to make it easier for the respondents to understand the questions and at the same time answer them more effectively because all of them were school going students. Also another reason for this structure of the questionnaire was to get answers to very specific topics.

Results

Introduction

This section presents the findings from the questionnaires that were filled by different students of Delhi. The questionnaire primarily focused on getting to know about the availability of the basic accessibility features and resources like trained teachers, books and technological aids that must be there in schools in order to promote a inclusiveness in the education system and provide equal and fair opportunities to the specially abled individuals as well.

Diagrammatic Representation and Share of the different choices for different questions

Diagrammatic representation helps in presenting results more effectively by simplifying complex information and making it visually accessible. Diagrams, charts,

and graphs provide a clear, concise way to illustrate patterns, trends, and relationships, making it easier to interpret data at a glance. They also engage the audience better, fostering quicker understanding and retention of the information. Overall, diagrammatic tools enhance communication, making abstract concepts more concrete and easier to explain.

Below are the charts of responses of respondents for the questions asked in the questionnaire. Each question is written in the form of heading and below it is its chart telling the shares of the choices of that particular question.
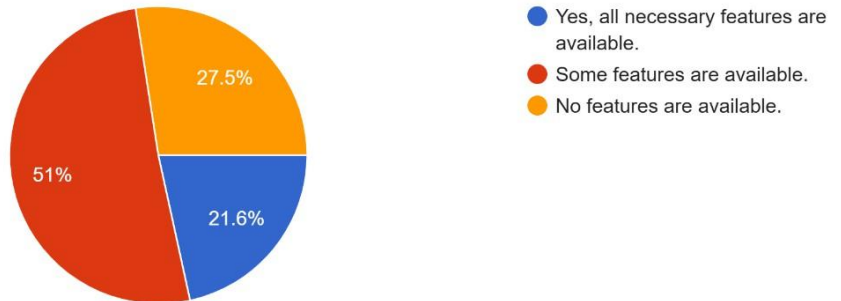
Public and Private School Distribution

36 individuals belonged to private schools while the remaining 15 were part of government schools.
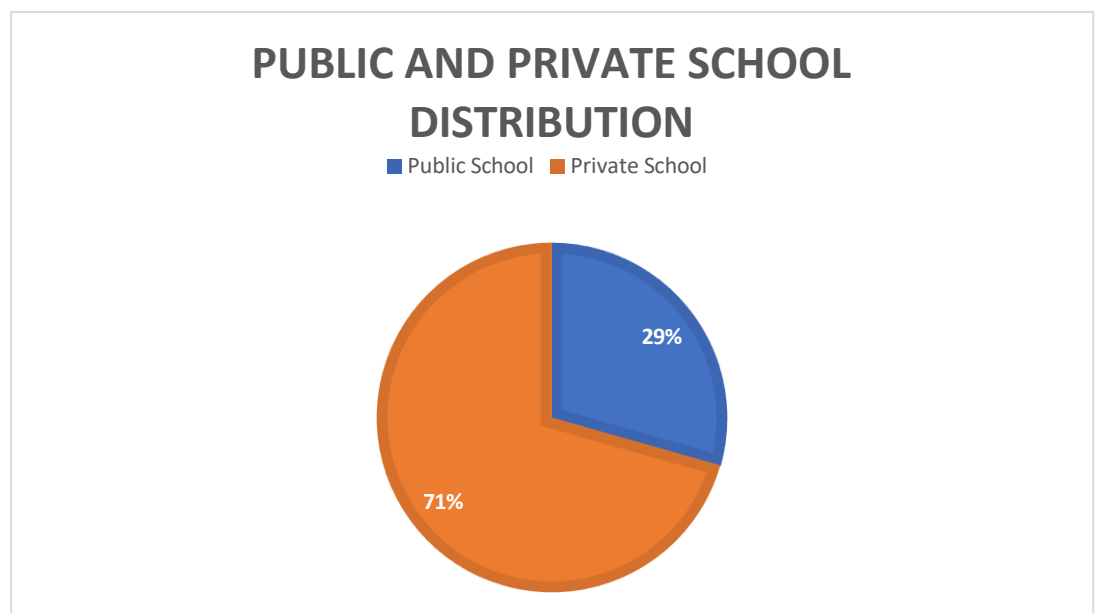
Accessibility features for specially-abled individuals

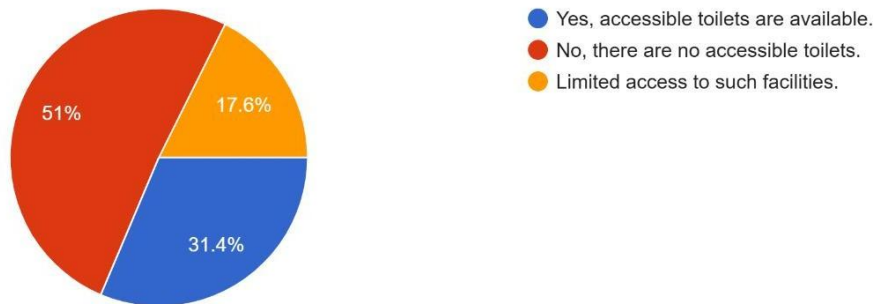Does your school have accessibility features for physically challenged students (e.g., ramps, elevators)?

51 responses

- Yes, all necessary features are available.
- Some features are available.
- No features are available.

27.5%
51%
21.6%

Accessible toilets for specially-abled individuals

Does your school provide accessible toilets for specially abled students?

51 responses

- Yes, accessible toilets are available.
- No, there are no accessible toilets.
- Limited access to such facilities.

51%
17.6%
31.4%
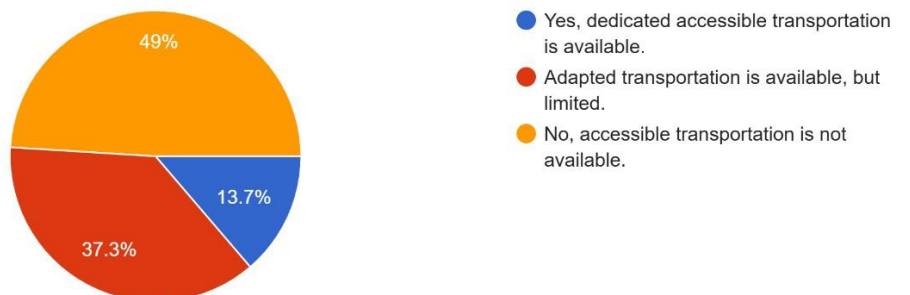
Availability of transportation facilities adapted for specially-abled individuals

Does your school provide transportation facilities adapted for specially-abled students?

51 responses

- Yes, dedicated accessible transportation is available.
- Adapted transportation is available, but limited.
- No, accessible transportation is not available.

49%
13.7%
37.3%

Availability of resources to support and educate specially-abled students (e.g., special education teachers, assistive devices, trained teachers for blind students)

Are there resources available to support and educate specially abled students (e.g., special education teachers, assistive devices, trained teachers for blind students)?
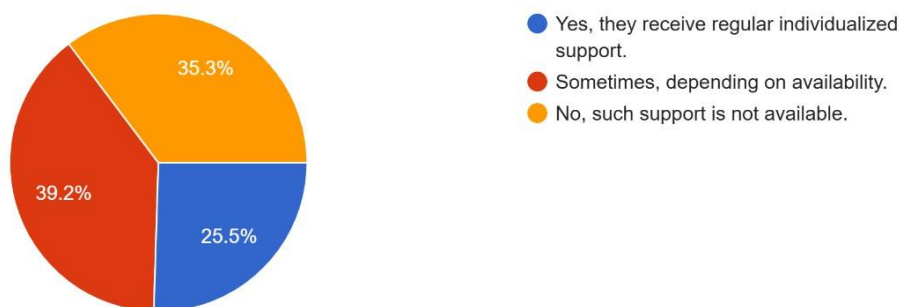
51 responses

- Always available.
- Often available.
- Rarely available.
- Never available.

25.5% · 15.7% · 25.5% · 33.3%
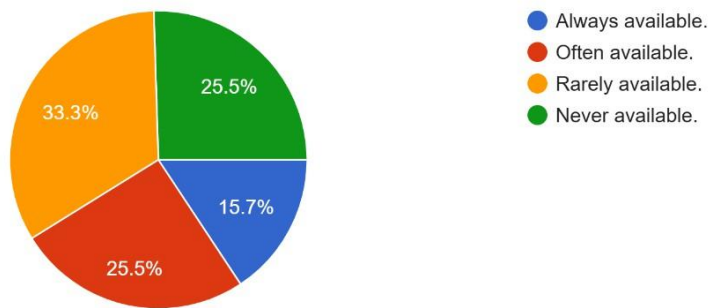
Provision of personalized support to specially-abled students in classrooms (e.g., teaching assistants, individualized lesson plans)

Do specially abled students receive personalized support in classrooms (e.g., teaching assistants, individualized lesson plans)?

51 responses

- Yes, they receive regular individualized support.
- Sometimes, depending on availability.
- No, such support is not available.

35.3% · 39.2% · 25.5%

Awareness of any specific government incentives that help specially-abled individuals access education or employment (e.g., scholarships, hiring incentives)

Are you aware of any specific government incentives that help specially abled individuals access education or employment (e.g., scholarships, hiring incentives)?

51 responses

- Yes, fully aware.
- Partially aware.
- Not aware at all.

31.4%

54.9%

13.7%
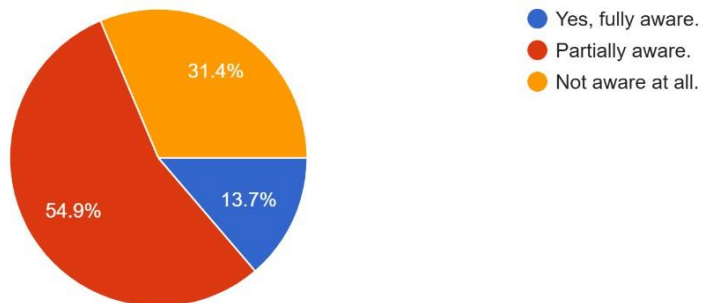
Perspective of student on whether government policies related to inclusive education are effectively implemented in their schools.

Do you think government policies related to inclusive education/employment are effectively implemented in your school or workplace?
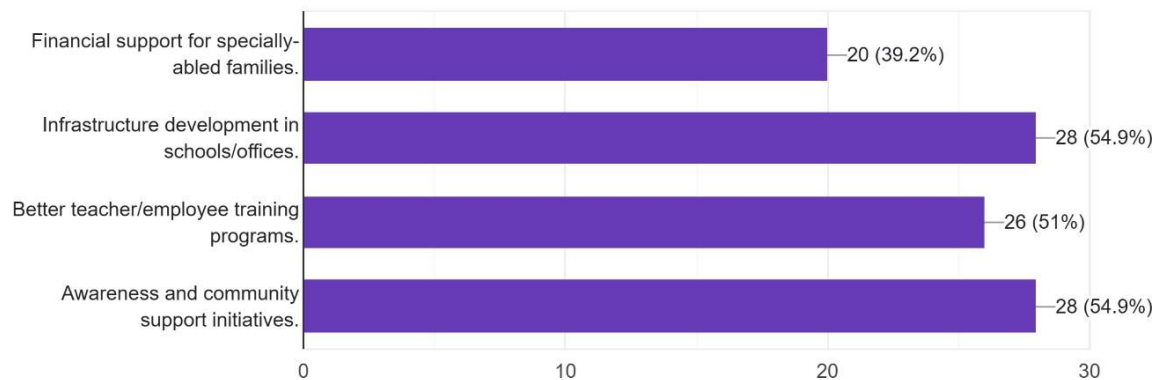
51 responses

- Yes, they are effectively implemented.
- Policies are in place but not properly implemented.
- There is no significant implementation of policies.

33.3%

47.1%

19.6%

Additional support that respondents believe the government or local authorities could provide to enhance inclusiveness in education or employment.

What additional support do you believe the government or local authorities could provide to enhance inclusiveness in education or employment?
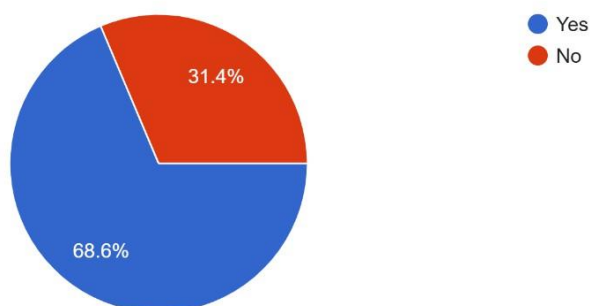
51 responses

Category	Value
Financial support for specially-abled families.	20 (39.2%)
Infrastructure development in schools/offices.	28 (54.9%)
Better teacher/employee training programs.	26 (51%)
Awareness and community support initiatives.	28 (54.9%)

Do respondents personally know any specially-abled individual (e.g., friend, relative, colleague)

Do you personally know any specially abled individuals (e.g., friend, relative, colleague)?

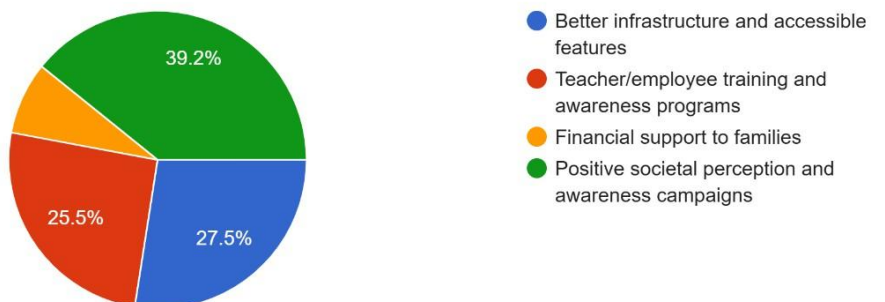51 responses

- Yes: 68.6%
- No: 31.4%

If the individual they know is not being educated or employed then what do they believe is the primary reason behind it

If the individual is not being educated or employed, what do you believe is the primary reason?

51 responses

- Financial constraints
- Lack of infrastructure and human capital
- Societal perception and pressure
- Lack of awareness about available facilities

31.4%
31.4%
13.7%
23.5%
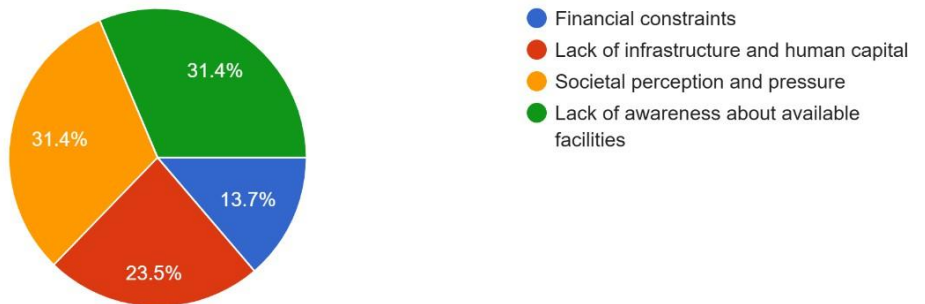
According to respondents, what would be the most significant factor to improve inclusiveness for specially-abled individuals in education or employment

In your opinion, what would be the most significant factor to improve inclusiveness for specially abled individuals in education or employment?

51 responses

- Better infrastructure and accessible features
- Teacher/employee training and awareness programs
- Financial support to families
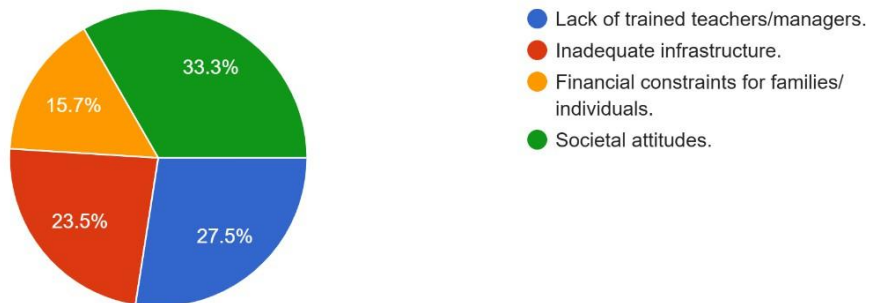- Positive societal perception and awareness campaigns

39.2%
25.5%
27.5%

According to the respondents what is the biggest barrier to inclusiveness in their schools

Which of the following do you perceive as the biggest barrier to inclusiveness in your school/workplace?

51 responses

- 🔵 Lack of trained teachers/managers.
- 🔴 Inadequate infrastructure.
- 🟠 Financial constraints for families/individuals.
- 🟢 Societal attitudes.

33.3%
15.7%
23.5%
27.5%

Key Findings

One of the things to highlight in these findings is that even though schools are not fully equipped with accessibility features that promote inclusiveness in the education system of India the responses suggest that there are some features available and majority of the responses state that the accessibility features are partially available. For the very first question which asks about the availability of accessibility features like ramps, lifts etc 51% of respondents have said that some features are available while 21.6% of respondents have said that all the necessary features are fully available. Same goes for the availability of of resources to support and educate specially-abled students (e.g., special education teachers, assistive devices, trained teachers for blind students) where only 25.5% of respondents said that these facilities are not available at all. Therefore, the remaining would be the one who said that these facilities were partially or fully available.

Now if we look at the questions which try to ask respondents the reasons why are specially-abled individuals not being educated and what is the biggest barrier today for there inclusion in the education sector majority of the individuals have said that it is due to societal perception and lack of awareness about the facilities available. Also, when asked about what would be the step to improve or solve these problems again majority of individuals chose the option of improving societal attitudes and perception.

These two findings tend to highlight that although there are if not full but partial availability of features that promote inclusiveness in the education system of India and promote fairness and equality in the system but the problem lies in the under utilization of these facilities and one of the key reasons for this is lack of awareness and societal attitudes and perceptions.

Discussion

Lack of awareness and societal perceptions significantly contribute to the decreased inclusiveness of the education system in India. These factors often lead to the underutilization of existing resources designed for specially-abled individuals.

1. **Lack of Awareness and Accessibility**

While policies and laws exist to support the specially-abled in India—such as the Right to Education (RTE) Act and the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act (RPWD), 2016—their implementation is often incomplete. Many schools and universities do not fully utilize the benefits provided under these acts due to:

- **Insufficient dissemination of information:** Schools, colleges, and even many teachers may not be aware of the specific accommodations and services available to specially-abled students. For example, many institutions have provisions for accessible classrooms, assistive devices, and exam concessions, but students and parents may not know how to request them or that they are entitled to them.
- **Poor infrastructure:** While government initiatives mandate accessible infrastructure (like ramps, lifts, and accessible toilets), in many parts of India, especially in rural or less-developed areas, this infrastructure is either not built or is built in a way that's not practically usable.
- **Lack of teacher training:** General education teachers often lack the training needed to effectively educate specially-abled students. This stems from an education system that doesn't adequately focus on special needs pedagogy during teacher training programs. Consequently, even if certain aids are available (such as Braille textbooks or hearing aids), their use might not be integrated into the teaching process.

2. **Societal Perception**

Indian society is still grappling with deep-rooted prejudices when it comes to disability, which perpetuates exclusion in the education system. Here are some key aspects:

- **Stigmatization**: People with disabilities are often subjected to pity or condescension. These attitudes can lead to their exclusion from mainstream education and social activities. Parents, teachers, and even administrators might believe that these students belong in separate, specialized schools, which can limit their exposure to inclusive environments.
- **Parental concerns:** Parents of specially-abled children may be discouraged from sending their children to mainstream schools due to societal pressures and fear of bullying or isolation. This is particularly common in rural areas where superstitions or misconceptions around disabilities prevail. Even in urban areas, parents often opt for home-schooling or specialized institutions if they believe mainstream education will not cater to their child's needs.
- **Beliefs about capability:** There is often an assumption that specially-abled individuals cannot achieve the same academic or professional success as their peers. This results in lower expectations and lesser attention to their

educational development. Teachers and students alike might view disability as a barrier to success, further isolating specially-abled students in classrooms.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the lack of awareness and societal perceptions create substantial barriers to the full utilization of available resources for specially-abled students in India. While government policies aim for inclusiveness, the gap between policy and practice remains wide, often due to insufficient knowledge, training, and infrastructure at the institutional level. To improve the situation, raising awareness through campaigns, training educators, and fostering a more inclusive mindset across society are crucial steps. These efforts can reduce stigma and ensure that the resources that do exist are maximized to support specially-abled individuals.

Limitations

1. Small Sample Size:

The study is based on responses from only 51 participants, which may not be representative of the entire population. A larger sample size could have provided more statistically significant results and a better understanding of the inclusiveness of specially-abled students across a wider range of schools.

2. Geographical Limitation:

The study only includes responses from Delhi-based individuals, which limits the ability to generalize the findings to the entire country. Education systems and the availability of resources for specially-abled students may vary significantly across different states, especially between urban and rural areas in India.

3. Focus on Student Perspective:

The questionnaire primarily focuses on students' perspectives. While this provides valuable insights, it may lack input from other stakeholders like school administrators, teachers, or policy-makers, whose viewpoints on inclusiveness might differ.

4. Quantitative Focus:

The study relies heavily on quantitative data from structured questions, which may not capture the depth and nuance of the experiences of specially-abled students. Qualitative data, such as interviews or open-ended responses, could provide richer, more contextual insights.

References

Inclusive education | UNICEF