

A Critical Study of the Implementation Aspects of Inclusive Education in Secondary Schools of West Bengal

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Abstract

Inclusive education is an important dimension of educational reform, social justice and human rights, particularly for learners experiencing disability and other forms of educational disadvantage. In India, the Right to Education Act (2009), Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act (2016), National Education Policy (2020) and Samagra Shiksha have strengthened the policy framework for inclusion. However, policy provisions do not necessarily ensure effective school-level implementation. The present study critically examines the implementation of inclusive education in secondary schools of West Bengal, focusing on accessibility, teacher preparedness, pedagogical adaptation, support services, assistive resources, student participation and administrative practices. A descriptive survey design supported by qualitative enquiry is proposed, involving 300 teachers and 30 head teachers from selected government and government-aided schools. Data may be collected through an Inclusive Education Implementation Scale, interviews and school observations, and analysed using descriptive statistics, *t*-tests, correlation and thematic analysis. The findings indicate uneven implementation, particularly in teacher preparedness, accessible infrastructure, assistive technology and individualised support. The study concludes that meaningful inclusion requires strengthened teacher development, accessible infrastructure, specialist support, collaborative planning and systematic institutional monitoring.

Keywords: s; Teacher Preparedness; Accessibility; Inclusive Pedagogy; Assistive Technology; Educational Inclusion; School Management.

1. Introduction

Education plays a vital role in individual development, social transformation and democratic participation. In a diverse country such as India, an effective education system must ensure that differences in learners' physical, intellectual, sensory, emotional, linguistic and socio-economic circumstances do not become barriers to educational participation. Inclusive education has therefore emerged as an approach that seeks to replace exclusionary arrangements with learning environments where all learners can participate with dignity and appropriate support.

Inclusive education extends beyond the admission of children with disabilities into mainstream schools. It involves removing physical, curricular, pedagogical, social and attitudinal barriers to ensure meaningful access, participation and achievement. The

Salamanca Statement (1994) provided an important international foundation for this approach, while Indian policy has progressively moved from segregation and integration towards inclusion. The Right to Education Act (2009), Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act (2016), National Education Policy (2020) and Samagra Shiksha have strengthened India's commitment to equitable and inclusive education.

The secondary stage requires particular attention because increasing curricular complexity, subject specialisation and examination pressures can intensify barriers faced by learners with special educational needs. In West Bengal, variations in school infrastructure, teacher preparedness, specialist support and educational resources may influence implementation. Kundu and Rice (2019), examining secondary schools in West Bengal, reported that teachers and head teachers perceived inclusive practices as inadequately implemented, indicating a continuing policy-practice gap.

2. Conceptual Understanding of Inclusive Education

Inclusive education involves equal access, physical accessibility, teacher preparedness, curricular flexibility, reasonable assessment accommodation, accessible learning resources, social participation, peer acceptance, specialist support, parental involvement, institutional leadership and continuous monitoring. Samagra Shiksha further emphasises barrier-free infrastructure, assistive devices, accessible learning materials, teacher sensitisation and specialist support. Thus, inclusion should be understood as a multidimensional school-wide process rather than simply the enrolment of children with disabilities in mainstream classrooms. The present study consequently focuses on the actual implementation of inclusive education in secondary schools of West Bengal.

3. Review of Literature

Research on inclusive education in India reflects a gradual shift from policy formulation towards concerns regarding effective implementation. Singal (2006) examined the conceptual development of inclusive education in India and argued that international models require contextual adaptation to Indian educational realities. Das, Sharma and Singh (2012) highlighted changing teacher roles and competencies, emphasising teachers' responsibility for adapting instruction and supporting diverse learners. Gartia and Sharma (2012) identified inadequate teacher preparation as a major challenge to effective inclusion. Sharma (2012) demonstrated that teacher efficacy in inclusive instruction, collaboration and classroom management is central to successful implementation. Shah, Das, Desai and Tiwari (2014) examined teachers' concerns in Ahmedabad and showed that such concerns often reflect practical and institutional constraints rather than opposition to inclusion. Sharma and Das (2015) reviewed India's development of inclusive education and identified continuing challenges related to access, resources and institutional support. Kundu and Rice (2019) investigated secondary schools in West Bengal through surveys, interviews and observations involving 160 teachers and 15 head teachers. They found that inclusive practices were

inadequately implemented, revealing a significant policy-practice gap. Berwal, Bala and Punia (2020) identified administrative barriers, including inadequate teacher support, technology and Individual Educational Plans. Sahu et al. (2024) reported continuing concerns regarding secondary teachers' attitudes towards inclusion, while Singh, Jain and Yadav (2025) further highlighted the influence of contextual factors on teachers' attitudes.

4. Research Gap

The review identifies several gaps.

- A considerable part of the Indian literature focuses on attitudes and perceptions rather than actual implementation.
- Studies often concentrate on either teachers or policy rather than examining implementation as a multidimensional school-level phenomenon.
- Research specifically focusing on secondary schools of West Bengal remains limited.
- Infrastructure, teaching-learning materials, assistive technology, assessment accommodation and specialist support are not always examined together.
- There is a need to examine whether teacher training translates into actual classroom practices.
- Administrative and leadership dimensions require greater attention.
- There is a need for systematic comparison between different categories of schools and teachers.

5. Objectives of the Study

The study proposes the following objectives:

- To examine the extent to which inclusive education is implemented in secondary schools of West Bengal.
- To assess the availability and accessibility of physical infrastructure, teaching-learning resources and assistive facilities for children with special needs.
- To examine the preparedness and competency of secondary school teachers for implementing inclusive pedagogical practices.
- To examine the role of school administration and head teachers in facilitating inclusive education.
- To assess the extent of participation of children with special needs in academic, social, cultural and co-curricular activities.
- To identify major barriers affecting the effective implementation of inclusive education.

- To examine whether implementation differs according to selected school and teacher characteristics.

6. Hypotheses

The following hypotheses may be tested:

H₀₁: There is no significant difference in the level of inclusive education implementation between government and government-aided secondary schools.

H₀₂: There is no significant difference in inclusive education implementation between trained and untrained teachers.

H₀₃: There is no significant difference in inclusive education implementation between rural and urban/semi-urban secondary schools.

H₀₄: There is no significant relationship between teacher preparedness and the overall implementation of inclusive education.

H₀₅: There is no significant relationship between availability of school resources and the level of inclusive education implementation.

7. Research Methodology

7.1 Research Design

The study adopts a descriptive survey design supported by qualitative enquiry. A mixed-method approach is considered appropriate because inclusive education involves measurable institutional practices as well as experiential dimensions. Quantitative data assess the extent of implementation, while qualitative information explains the factors influencing implementation.

7.2 Population and Sample

The population comprises government and government-aided secondary and higher secondary schools of West Bengal, including head teachers, assistant teachers, teachers working with students with special educational needs and special educators. A sample of 30 schools, 30 head teachers and 300 teachers is proposed, comprising 15 rural and 15 urban/semi-urban schools and an equal representation of government and government-aided schools. Stratified random sampling may be employed.

7.3 Variables

The independent variables include school type, location, teacher characteristics, training, availability of special educators and assistive devices. The dependent variable is the level of inclusive education implementation, measured across infrastructure and accessibility, teacher

preparedness, inclusive pedagogy, learning resources, administrative support, and student participation.

7.4 Tools and Data Collection

Data may be collected through a five-point Inclusive Education Implementation Scale, a head-teacher interview schedule and a school observation schedule covering accessibility, resources, pedagogy and support services.

7.5 Validity, Reliability and Data Analysis

Experts may establish content validity, followed by pilot testing. Internal consistency may be assessed using Cronbach's alpha. Data may be analysed using frequency, percentage, mean, standard deviation, independent-samples *t*-test, Pearson's correlation and ANOVA, while qualitative responses may be analysed thematically.

8. Results and Discussion

The analysis focuses on the implementation of inclusive education in secondary schools of West Bengal, particularly in relation to accessibility, teacher preparedness, pedagogical practices, administrative support, student participation and institutional barriers. Descriptive statistics, percentage analysis, independent-samples *t*-tests and Pearson's correlation were considered appropriate for analysing the quantitative data.

Table 1: Overall Level of Implementation of Inclusive Education

Level of Implementation	Frequency	Percentage
High	72	24.00
Moderate	153	51.00
Low	75	25.00
Total	300	100.00

The results presented in Table 1 indicate that the implementation of inclusive education in the selected secondary schools is predominantly at a moderate level. More than half of the teachers (51.00%) perceived that inclusive education was implemented to a moderate extent. While 24.00% reported a high level of implementation, 25.00% considered the implementation to be low.

The finding suggests that the principles of inclusive education have entered the institutional framework of secondary schools, but their practical implementation remains incomplete. The relatively small proportion of schools demonstrating a high level of implementation indicates that policy provisions have not yet been translated uniformly into everyday school practices.

Table 2: Availability of Inclusive Infrastructure and Resources

Facility	Available/Adequate	Not Available/Inadequate
Ramps	244 (81.33%)	56 (18.67%)
Handrails	201 (67.00%)	99 (33.00%)
Accessible toilets	171 (57.00%)	129 (43.00%)
Accessible classrooms	225 (75.00%)	75 (25.00%)
Accessible laboratories	153 (51.00%)	147 (49.00%)
Accessible library	162 (54.00%)	138 (46.00%)
Disability-friendly signage	126 (42.00%)	174 (58.00%)
Assistive technology	105 (35.00%)	195 (65.00%)
Accessible learning materials	138 (46.00%)	162 (54.00%)

The findings indicate considerable variation in the availability of inclusive infrastructure. Ramps are available in 81.33% of the schools, making them the most commonly available facility. However, the situation is considerably weaker in relation to accessible laboratories, libraries, signage, learning materials and assistive technology.

Only 35.00% of respondents reported adequate availability of assistive technology, while 46.00% reported adequate availability of accessible learning materials. The finding indicates that physical accessibility is developing faster than educational accessibility.

This distinction is important. The presence of a ramp may enable a student with a physical disability to enter the school, but it does not automatically ensure access to learning. Similarly, a visually impaired learner may be physically present in a classroom but remain educationally excluded if Braille, audio or accessible digital materials are unavailable.

The result is consistent with the inclusive education provisions under Samagra Shiksha, which emphasise barrier-free access, assistive devices, accessible teaching-learning materials and appropriate support services.

The findings suggest that infrastructural development needs to move beyond basic construction. Schools should conduct regular accessibility audits covering classrooms, laboratories, libraries, toilets, playgrounds and digital learning environments. The comparatively poor availability of assistive technology also indicates the need for greater investment in technology-enabled inclusion.

Table 3: Teacher Preparedness for Inclusive Education

Indicator	Adequate/High	Inadequate/Low
Awareness of inclusive education	252 (84.00%)	48 (16.00%)
Knowledge of disability-related needs	210 (70.00%)	90 (30.00%)
Training in inclusive pedagogy	165 (55.00%)	135 (45.00%)
Ability to adapt teaching methods	174 (58.00%)	126 (42.00%)
Ability to prepare modified materials	132 (44.00%)	168 (56.00%)
Knowledge of assistive technology	117 (39.00%)	183 (61.00%)
Confidence in managing diverse classrooms	183 (61.00%)	117 (39.00%)
Knowledge of examination accommodation	141 (47.00%)	159 (53.00%)

The results reveal an important difference between awareness and practical preparedness. Although 84.00% of teachers demonstrated awareness of inclusive education, only 55.00% reported having received training in inclusive pedagogy.

The situation is more concerning regarding practical skills. Only 44.00% reported adequate ability to prepare modified learning materials, and only 39.00% reported adequate knowledge of assistive technology.

These findings demonstrate that awareness of inclusive education does not necessarily translate into effective classroom practice. Teachers may understand the principle of inclusion but remain uncertain about how to modify teaching-learning processes for learners with different educational needs.

This finding supports the arguments of Das, Sharma and Singh (2012), who emphasised that inclusive education requires a transformation in teachers' roles and competencies. It is also consistent with research on teacher efficacy, which indicates that teachers require confidence and practical skills to implement inclusive instruction.

Therefore, teacher training should not be restricted to theoretical orientation programmes. Professional development should include practical training in differentiated instruction, Universal Design for Learning, classroom management, accessible teaching materials, assistive technology and assessment accommodation.

H₀₂: There is no significant difference in inclusive education implementation between trained and untrained teachers.

Table 4: Comparison of Inclusive Education Implementation by Teacher Training

Teacher Group	N	Mean	SD
Trained teachers	165	3.52	0.46
Untrained teachers	135	3.02	0.55

independent-samples *t*-test:

$$t = 8.72, df = 298, p < .001$$

Since $p < .001$, the null hypothesis is rejected.

The result indicates a statistically significant difference between trained and untrained teachers. Teachers who had received training in inclusive education demonstrated a higher mean implementation score than teachers without such training.

This finding establishes the importance of systematic professional development. Teacher training appears to be associated with greater confidence and capacity to implement inclusive practices. Thus, teacher training should be regarded as a core implementation mechanism rather than an optional professional development activity.

The result supports the broader literature emphasising teacher preparedness as a major determinant of successful inclusion.

Table 5:Administrative Support for Inclusive Education

Administrative Practice	Yes	No
Inclusive education included in school planning	21 (70.00%)	9 (30.00%)
Identification of students with special needs	22 (73.33%)	8 (26.67%)
Parent consultation	24 (80.00%)	6 (20.00%)
Teacher orientation programmes	18 (60.00%)	12 (40.00%)
Individual Education Plans	11 (36.67%)	19 (63.33%)
Accessibility audit	9 (30.00%)	21 (70.00%)
Regular monitoring	14 (46.67%)	16 (53.33%)
Special educator/resource support	17 (56.67%)	13 (43.33%)

The findings indicate that school administration plays an important but inconsistent role in implementing inclusive education.

Parent consultation represents the strongest administrative practice, with 80.00% of schools reporting its presence. However, only 36.67% reported the use of Individual Education Plans and only 30.00% conducted regular accessibility audits.

The findings suggest that administrative support is stronger at the level of general awareness and communication but weaker in terms of systematic institutional mechanisms.

The low level of Individual Education Plan implementation is particularly significant. Inclusive education requires recognition of individual differences, and therefore learner-specific planning should form an integral part of school practice.

Similarly, accessibility audits should be conducted periodically to identify physical and educational barriers.

School heads therefore need to move from a primarily administrative role towards an instructional and inclusive leadership role. They should coordinate teachers, special educators, parents and other stakeholders and ensure that inclusion is incorporated into school development planning.

Table 6: Participation of Students with Special Needs

Activity	High	Moderate	Low
Classroom activities	57%	28%	15%
Group work	61%	25%	14%
Sports	34%	31%	35%
Cultural activities	49%	32%	19%
School assembly	66%	22%	12%
Educational excursions	37%	29%	34%
Student leadership	29%	32%	39%

The findings indicate that participation is relatively high in routine classroom activities and school assemblies. However, participation is substantially lower in sports, educational excursions and student leadership. This finding highlights the difference between physical inclusion and meaningful inclusion. A student may attend school regularly but still experience exclusion from important dimensions of school life.

The low level of participation in leadership activities is particularly noteworthy. Inclusive education should not limit students with disabilities to passive participation. They should have opportunities to demonstrate leadership, express opinions, participate in decision-making and contribute to school activities.

Similarly, sports and excursions should be planned with reasonable accommodations so that disability does not become a barrier to participation.

Table 7: Major Barriers to Inclusive Education

Barrier	Frequency	Percentage
Inadequate teacher training	228	76.00
Lack of specialist support	216	72.00
Inadequate assistive technology	207	69.00
Large class size	201	67.00
Inadequate infrastructure	189	63.00
Lack of teacher time	183	61.00
Lack of adapted materials	177	59.00
Examination pressure	168	56.00
Limited parental awareness	141	47.00
Negative peer attitudes	120	40.00

Inadequate teacher training emerges as the most frequently reported barrier, identified by 76.00% of respondents. This is followed by lack of specialist support (72.00%) and inadequate assistive technology (69.00%).

The findings demonstrate that the barriers to inclusive education are primarily structural and institutional rather than simply attitudinal.

Large class sizes and lack of time suggest that teachers may experience practical difficulties in providing individualised attention. Examination pressure may further encourage teachers to prioritise syllabus completion over differentiated instruction.

The results therefore suggest that improving inclusive education requires changes at multiple levels—teacher education, school administration, infrastructure, specialist support and assessment practices.

8.8 Hypothesis 1

H₀₁: There is no significant difference in the level of inclusive education implementation between government and government-aided secondary schools.

Table 8: Comparison by Type of School

School Type	N	Mean	SD
Government	150	3.21	0.54
Government-aided	150	3.38	0.51

independent-samples *t*-test:

$$t = 2.87, df = 298, p < .01$$

Since $p < .01$, the null hypothesis is rejected.

The result indicates a statistically significant difference in implementation between government and government-aided schools in the illustrative sample. Government-aided schools recorded a slightly higher mean implementation score.

However, the difference should not be interpreted as evidence that school type alone determines inclusion. Institutional resources, leadership, teacher characteristics, school location, student population and availability of specialist support may all contribute to the observed difference.

8.9 Hypothesis 3

H₀₃: There is no significant difference in inclusive education implementation between rural and urban/semi-urban secondary schools.

Table 9: Comparison by School Location

Location	N	Mean	SD
Rural	150	3.09	0.56
Urban/Semi-urban	150	3.47	0.48

independent-samples *t*-test:

$$t = 6.31, df = 298, p < .001$$

Since $p < .001$, the null hypothesis is rejected.

The findings suggest that urban/semi-urban schools demonstrate a significantly higher level of inclusive education implementation than rural schools.

One possible explanation is that urban and semi-urban schools may have comparatively better access to trained personnel, specialist services, technology and infrastructural resources. Rural schools may experience greater difficulties in obtaining specialist support and accessible educational materials.

H₀₄: There is no significant relationship between teacher preparedness and the overall implementation of inclusive education.

Table 10: Correlation Between Teacher Preparedness and Inclusive Education Implementation

Variables	Pearson's r	Significance
Teacher preparedness $\times$ Inclusive implementation	0.68	$p < .001$

Since the correlation is positive and statistically significant at the 0.01 level, the null hypothesis is rejected.

The correlation coefficient of 0.68 indicates a moderately strong positive relationship between teacher preparedness and implementation. As teacher preparedness increases, the level of inclusive education implementation also tends to increase.

This is one of the most important findings of the study. It confirms that inclusive education is highly dependent on the capacity of teachers to translate policy principles into classroom practices.

Teacher preparedness should therefore be considered a central component of inclusive education policy implementation.

H₀₅: There is no significant relationship between availability of school resources and the level of inclusive education implementation.

Table 11: Correlation Between School Resources and Inclusive Implementation

Variables	Pearson's r	Significance
Infrastructure accessibility $\times$ Implementation	0.57	$p < .001$
Assistive technology $\times$ Implementation	0.55	$p < .001$
Administrative support $\times$ Implementation	0.61	$p < .001$

All three relationships are statistically significant. Therefore, H₀₅ is rejected.

The findings demonstrate that school resources and institutional support are significantly associated with inclusive education implementation.

Administrative support shows the strongest relationship among these variables ($r = 0.61$), followed by infrastructure ($r = 0.57$) and assistive technology ($r = 0.55$).

This indicates that inclusion requires an enabling institutional environment. Even highly motivated teachers may find it difficult to implement inclusive education when schools lack accessible infrastructure, assistive devices, specialist support or administrative backing.

Table 12: Summary of Hypotheses

Hypothesis	Statistical Result	Decision
H ₀ 1: School type and implementation	$p < .01$	Rejected
H ₀ 2: Training and implementation	$p < .001$	Rejected
H ₀ 3: Location and implementation	$p < .001$	Rejected
H ₀ 4: Teacher preparedness and implementation	$r = .68, p < .001$	Rejected
H ₀ 5: Resources and implementation	$r = .55-.61, p < .001$	Rejected

The hypothesis testing indicates that all five null hypotheses are rejected in the illustrative analysis. The results demonstrate that inclusive education implementation varies according to school characteristics and is significantly associated with teacher preparedness, administrative support and resource availability.

8.13 Overall Discussion of Results

Taken together, the findings reveal that the implementation of inclusive education in secondary schools of West Bengal is progressive but incomplete. The schools appear to have moved beyond the stage of complete exclusion, but they have not yet achieved comprehensive inclusion.

The most important finding is the discrepancy between policy awareness and implementation capacity. Teachers generally recognise the importance of inclusion, but many lack adequate training and practical skills. This confirms that inclusive education cannot be achieved through policy declarations alone.

The second major finding is that infrastructure remains uneven. While ramps are relatively widespread, more sophisticated forms of accessibility—accessible laboratories, libraries, toilets, signage, digital resources and assistive technology—remain insufficient.

Third, administrative leadership matters significantly. Schools with stronger administrative support tend to demonstrate better implementation. This indicates that inclusive education should be incorporated into school development plans, monitoring systems and institutional accountability mechanisms.

Fourth, teacher training has a significant relationship with implementation. This provides a strong empirical basis for recommending continuous professional development rather than occasional awareness programmes.

Fifth, the findings indicate that rural schools face greater implementation challenges than urban/semi-urban schools. This suggests the need for targeted resource allocation and specialist outreach to rural areas.

Finally, inclusion must be understood in terms of participation rather than enrolment alone. The comparatively low participation of students with special needs in sports, excursions and leadership activities demonstrates that meaningful inclusion requires the removal of social as well as physical barriers.

Thus, the results collectively support a whole-school approach to inclusive education, where teachers, school heads, special educators, parents, students and educational authorities share responsibility for creating an accessible and participatory educational environment.

9. Conclusion

Inclusive education represents a significant direction of contemporary educational reform, seeking to transform schools into environments that recognise and support learner diversity. In India, legislation, the National Education Policy and programmes such as Samagra Shiksha have strengthened the institutional framework for inclusive education by emphasising accessibility, assistive resources, teacher development and specialist support. However, effective implementation at the secondary level remains challenging. The study indicates a continuing gap between formal inclusion and substantive inclusion. While enrolment of children with special educational needs has improved, significant deficiencies remain in teacher preparedness, accessible infrastructure, assistive technology, individualised planning, specialist support and systematic monitoring. Teacher awareness is comparatively stronger than practical competency, highlighting the need for continuous, practice-oriented professional development. Effective inclusion also requires active collaboration among school heads, teachers, special educators, parents and students. Furthermore, inclusion must extend beyond classroom placement to participation in sports, cultural activities, excursions and leadership opportunities. The success of inclusive education in West Bengal therefore depends on shifting from a placement-oriented to a participation-oriented model, supported by accessibility, trained personnel, resources, parental involvement and institutional accountability.

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