



A SOCIOECONOMIC FACTORS INFLUENCING ACCESS TO EDUCATION FOR CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES IN INDIA

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Abstract

Over the years, the central and state governments of India have developed policies and programs to aid the social inclusion of impaired children. Disabled children still face substantial challenges to entering and completing primary school, notwithstanding these measures. The article focuses on observations, analysis, and meets with numerous stakeholders over the past 30 years who have been involved in the field of education for PwD to inquire through the bigger issues in the current educational system in terms of educational quality and drop-out ratio for primary students with PwD. The accessibility of education for children with disabilities is influenced by many factors, including the attitudes of society, government officials, school staff, and infrastructure; the lack of training of key stakeholders; the invisibility of disability in the community; poverty; a lack of acceptance and a lack of interest; and the perceptions and experiences of parents of PwD and their difficulties in helping their disabled children.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Every child, regardless of their physical or mental condition, has the right to an education since it helps them become independent adults. Education should include teaching children about the world around them. As a potent instrument of social change that typically drives ascent in the social hierarchy, it is a human right with great potential to alter the world in which we find ourselves. Education can be achieved if all children are able to attend schools that meet their individual needs. International human rights treaties such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1946), the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), and the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006) prohibit discrimination in education on the basis of gender, ethnicity, language, religion, nationality, socioeconomic status, abilities, and so on. But millions of kids still can't get into (or even find) schools in their own countries. As a result of government initiatives, India's educational landscape has shifted significantly over the years, leading to higher-quality options for students. Education for children with disabilities requires careful consideration in light of the changing educational climate in India. This talk draws from 30 years of work in the field of special education and from my own experiences, research, and conversations with other professionals in the field.i

2. THE EDUCATION STATUS OF DISABLED CHILDREN

As of the 2011 Census, India has a total population of 1.2 billion, with around 833 million living in rural regions. There are 164.5 million children with disabilities around the globe. Twenty-five percent of the literate disabled population had only completed primary school (five years of training), eleven percent had only completed middle school (eight years of training), and just nine percent had completed high school or higher. It was shown that the percentage of impaired kids enrolled in a regular school between the ages of 5 and 18 was actually higher in rural areas than in metropolitan ones. Finding accurate statistics on the prevalence of disability in India is challenging, and the school system for children with disabilities in the country has several serious shortcomings.ii

Disabled kids in India can attend regular classrooms or specialized institutions. During the latter 20 years of the nineteenth century, Christian missionaries brought the special school to India. Many urban regions offer special schools that are equipped to teach students with disabilities. Schools and the special education system were divided because it was often believed that children with impairments could not be educated with their typically developing peers. While these institutions helped make it possible for disadvantaged kids to get an education, they did nothing to prepare them for life outside of special education. TargetStudy.com, "Special Education for Disabled," Organizations, SYS, SSA This alternative educational model also has major limitations, including high costs and low participation. The legislation permits the development of special schools for children with impairments, notwithstanding the shortcomings of these schools and their impact on the lives of the children who attend them. Money and a plan to construct special schools were revealed by the Ministry of Welfare, which is now known as the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment. Schools for students with exceptional needs are a top priority of this project. 240 school districts in the United States do not have any special education schools at this time (Baquer & Sharma, 2006). Approximately 3000 special schools are open right now, catering to kids with a wide range of impairments. Approximately 900 schools serve those with a visual impairment, 400 serve those with a hearing loss, 1,000 serve those with a mental impairment, and 700 serve those with a physical impairment (Bagga, 2007). These institutions have been approved by the Rehabilitation Council of India to receive funding from the Indian government. Only a fraction of students with disabilities can be accommodated by the current special education system (Byrd, 2010). However, under the integration system, students were still given separate attention in the classroom. This gave rise to the concept of "inclusive education," which advocates for the inclusion of children with disabilities of all types and levels in regular classroom settings. A lot more work needs to be done after its introduction into classrooms (Zacharia, 2000). The majority of disabled children in India do not receive the proper schooling. Therefore, the Government of India has established specific measures with the expectation that individual states will be accountable for guaranteeing that all children, regardless of handicap, have access to education within a given time frame. The Indian government has put in place a programme called the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) in order to comply with the demands of the 86th Amendment to the Indian Constitution, which ensures free and compulsory education for all children in India between the ages of 6 and 14. Teachers participating in the government's Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) program are helping locate and enroll students with disabilities who may not have previously been enrolled in or dropped out of school. Baquer and Sharma (2006) estimate that 35 million children in India are disabled, but only 1% of them attend school regularly. Education for children with disabilities (CWD) has been a priority for Indian policymakers for decades. Laws, programs, and organizations have been established to carry out the many facets of the Indian government's plan for PWD.

3. EDUCATION POLICY FRAMEWORK FOR CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES

India has an obligation to uphold human rights because it ratified the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1946, the UNESCO Convention against Discrimination in Education in 1960, and the Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1989. Indian policy on education for children with disabilities has been shaped by a number of international texts, notably the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006) and the Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Disability Education (1994). In response to criticisms of the 1990 law and in order to meet international treaty commitments, the Persons with Disabilities Act (PWD) of 2011 was passed. As a result, the measure was passed into law in 2014, and new provisions regarding guardianship and the National Trust Act are being put into effect. Orders of "limited guardianship" and the introduction of brand new forms of assistance are all within the scope of these potential alterations. This paves the way for people with impairments to have greater freedom of action and decision. A society where people of all abilities may fully exercise their rights is a goal of the legislation passed in 2014. In India, all children, regardless of their race, creed, color, nationality, socioeconomic status, or mental or physical impairment, have access to a free and excellent education. All Indians are guaranteed social fairness, equal position, and equal opportunity in the Constitution's opening preamble. Article 45 of the Constitution of India, as amended by Act 86 of 2002, ensures that all children in India between the ages of 6 and 14 have access to a free and appropriate public education.ⁱⁱⁱ

4. INITIATIVES TO IMPROVE THE EDUCATION OF CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES

There have been several efforts since independence on August 15, 1947, to ensure that students with impairments have equal opportunities to attend mainstream schools. In 1964, the Kothari Commission advocated for the integration of children with special needs into regular schools. According to the findings of the Kothari Commission. The National Policy on Education adopted the theme of educational equity in 1986. Section 4.9 of this policy is dedicated solely to meeting the needs of PwD. However, the initiative fell short of its goals due to a variety of causes, including unqualified lecturers, insufficient materials, poor coordination across departments, and so on.. A national initiative to educate all children and youth, regardless of disability, followed. Unfortunately, the initiative's intended impact of expanding educational opportunities for people with impairments did not materialize (Baquer & Sharma, 2006). The federal government and individual states have both passed laws and launched programs over the years to help children with special needs make the leap from childhood to adulthood. There is not enough effort put into disseminating this information, and as a result, many children with impairments go without the educational support they require. The concept of inclusive education has been promoted internationally for over a decade, but in India, there are still many obstacles that keep children with disabilities from fully participating in the educational process. Discriminatory attitudes and a lack of awareness about impairments are to blame for the persistent failure to recognize the rights of people with disabilities to an education. This provides a plausible rationale for the low rates of school enrollment and participation among disabled children. The issues are wide-ranging and extend well beyond the classroom.

5. FACTORS INFLUENCING EDUCATIONAL FACILITY ACCESS

Children with impairments in India face significant barriers to enrolling in and completing primary school. Disabled people are disproportionately left out of the educational system, as stated in a 2009 report by the World Bank. According to the poll, children from scheduled tribes and castes are four to five times less likely to attend school. Because of factors including tuition, transportation costs, and the inability to provide accompaniment, parents of children with disabilities sometimes have to prioritize the education of children without disabilities. The results indicated that the severity of a child's handicap was negatively correlated with school attendance. The survey found that the educational attainment of people with disabilities was significantly lower than that of the general population, with 52% of people with disabilities being illiterate compared to 35% of the overall population. Children with visual, physical, and mental problems (as well as children with severe disabilities across all categories) have disproportionately high illiteracy rates compared to those without disabilities. Few resources have been allocated to improving education for the seriously disabled. Low enrolment rates correlate with poor academic outcomes. High numbers of students leave school early (Baquer & Sharma, 2006). Although there is a constitutional, rights-based policy framework for disabled children, many obstacles have slowed the expansion of educational opportunities for them. The challenges surrounding the low rates of enrolment and graduation among children with disabilities in India must be understood in light of the available data.^{iv}

6. PARENTS

6.1 Parents' Attitudes towards Education and Disability:

The way parents feel about their kids going to school can either be a huge help or a huge hindrance on the path to full social integration. The outlook of the child's parents is crucial in determining the child's general growth and development. Parents' experiences of discrimination because of their handicap are transmitted to their offspring. Parents go through stages of denial, anger, and acceptance as they come to terms with their child's disability. The nature, severity, and degree of a child's handicap all play a role in how much support they receive from their parents. Some families may feel frustrated by their children's slowed development as a result. Therefore, the kid might have to switch schools rather often. Some families may wrongly believe that their disabled children will not receive an appropriate education. Some research suggests that overprotective parents may have a negative effect on their children's academic performance.v

6.2 Inadequate Facility Awareness:

While the government of India has several programs and initiatives in place to help children with disabilities, many rural and impoverished communities do not have access to these programs. Many regular and alternative schools aren't aware of the centers, so they can't refer parents there for help. The majority of parents do not have adequate information on access points, educational aid, vocational training, test waivers, etc. Because of their ignorance of available resources, parents are unable to give their impaired children a more suitable education. It is not well known that there is funding available to help mainstream students with disabilities into regular classes, and this is especially true among parents and educators.

6.3 Inadequate Knowledge of Disability Certificate:

A lack of knowledge about disability certificate itself, the availability of disability certificate, the process for obtaining the disability certificate, and the value of the disability certificate all contributed to the fact that many disabled children lacked this document. Without a disability certificate, many families decide against enrolling their children in public school so that they can take advantage of federal funding for special education.

6.4 Discrimination based on Gender :

Every culture has its own distinct historical context and evolving social conditions, both of which interact with gender stereotypes to build a complex disability. Disabled women in India encounter numerous sorts of bias due to both their disability and their gender. Despite a shift in parental views, preconceptions regarding girls with disabilities' capacities and value continue to foster the belief that education is pointless for them. Because of this attitude, many families with impaired daughters choose to keep them at home instead of sending them to school. Since girls typically marry into their husband's family, they are not seen as a worthwhile educational investment, whereas boys typically stay with and provide for their own. That's why 68% of handicapped women are homeschooled. Urban versus rural, kind of schooling, level of education, and primary versus secondary school enrollment all show a lower enrollment rate for girls with disabilities than for boys with impairments (Kohama, 2012, p. 32). One study found that only 7% of disabled women in the Raichur region of Karnataka state could read and write, whereas the statewide average was 46%. Disabled women and girls have been mostly overlooked by the field of gender studies. Therefore, the needs of impaired girls may be greater than those of any other demographic and should be accommodated across the board (NCERT, 2005).

7. CIVIL SOCIETY

7.1 Stigma :

In India, children born with impairments face discrimination from birth for a number of cultural and religious reasons. The burdens of education are compounded for them by patriarchal norms, traditional caste boundaries, and differences in socioeconomic and religious background. Many people still believe that a child's impairment is the result of bad "karma" (fate), crimes committed in a previous life, or a solar eclipse that occurred while the mother was carrying the child. Both religious and folk beliefs contribute to the stigma. According to Hindu mythology, a crippled person is dangerous and should be avoided at all costs. Families raising a disabled child often work hard to deny and hide their child's condition as a response to society's contempt for disability and people with disabilities. Children with mental retardation, autism, or various disabilities are more at risk for this. Due to the taboo or shame associated with having a disability, some families may be unwilling to enroll their children in school.

7.2 Inadequate awareness:

Few people understand how a child's disability can hinder their growth and how they'll need specialized teaching methods to graduate high school. Therefore, parents fail to appreciate the importance of education for their children with special needs and do not know how to effectively advocate for their children.

7.3 Disabilities with Unnoticed Characteristics in the Community:

Invisible disabilities may go unnoticed by the general public. Children with learning disabilities are often misunderstood and labeled as "stupid, useless, and insane" by those who are unaware of the challenges these kids face. Some parents may blame the label for their child's lack of development. Thus, they may switch schools regularly or come to the conclusion that investing in such kids' education is futile because it won't improve their lives. According to Bagga (2007), the general public may be insensitive to the needs of children with disabilities since they are not exposed to them in their everyday lives.

8. SCHOOL

8.1 Selection of school:

Medical professionals will typically recommend a specialized school for a child's education after making a diagnosis. Medical doctors and other disability professionals advise parents to enrol their child in mainstream education. In doing so, parents especially those living in rural areas where there are fewer facilities for early intervention, are not counselled about school selection. Schools for children with multiple disabilities are scarce, especially in rural areas, whereas schools for children with visual impairments, hearing impairments, and intellectual disabilities are concentrated in major cities. This forces parents to enrol their children in regular schools, where educators may lack experience with special education. Some special schools admit students with disabilities without an evaluation or interview with the family, while many others do so. My primary finding was that many places do not offer educational counselling to parents, such as explaining the repercussions of a handicap, the specific pedagogy needed for a type of impairment, and the time and energy needed for educational intervention. If a special school is not available or is too far away, a child from a lower socioeconomic background may enroll in a regular municipal school. Therefore, parents' decisions about which school to send their children to are influenced by both professional advice and the proximity of that school to their home. The Social Security Administration (SSA) employs teachers to find and enrol students with disabilities who have dropped out or never attended school.vi

8.2 School issue:

Historically, students with visual, auditory, or intellectual disabilities have attended separate schools. Special education facilities, in general, are more common in major cities than in rural areas. In special education settings, many children with disabilities performed worse on standardized tests in reading and math, had lower expectations of their own potential, and were less comfortable interacting with peers. Because of this, many families decided against enrolling their disabled children in school.

8.3 Accessibility Aid:

Many special education institutions are ill-equipped to inform parents about the value of assistive technology and show them how to best help their students. A child with hearing loss may not receive adequate support from teachers at a deaf school because they lack training on how to use assistive listening devices. As a result, both the children and their parents lose interest in the instruments, which negatively affects the children's academic progress. The majority of schools and parents favor spoken language; however, there is some controversy about the use of sign language for learning. Some families may also have trouble obtaining the necessary aid and devices because rehabilitative services tend to be concentrated in major cities. In addition, some families were not aware of the availability of free resources like assistance and equipment through income-based programs. Some parents also reported that their children were hampered by the designs.

1. Perceptions that are unpleasant towards people with disabilities and the education of children with disabilities: Some non-disabled children and teachers exhibit a hostile attitude towards disabled children in
 - Regular high school with the usual prejudice, hostility, bullying, tagging, and verbal abusing, and so on.
 - The majority of children with disabilities and their parents drop out of school because so few mainstream institutions make an effort to learn about and accommodate these students' unique needs. Because of this, a lot of parents are keeping their kids home..

- Staff in educational institutions must be properly trained and supervised so that they can instruct children with impairments effectively. As the teacher's opinions can affect the child's social, emotional, and cognitive development, they play a crucial role in the education of children with disabilities.
2. Teachers at special schools have had initial preparation to work with pupils who have special needs, but they also need ongoing professional development to remain current in their field. Unfortunately, many qualified educators in the field of special education prefer to work for the government or in a public school run by the government. Once they have that position, they no longer feel the need to continue learning or developing new methods to aid children in reaching their full potential. vii
 - In addition, teachers who have completed the special education teacher preparation program are not adequately prepared to work in an inclusive classroom (Mondal, July 18, 2015). Teachers at a private school for disabled children on short contracts are distracted from their students because they are applying to other schools. The education of children with disabilities is hampered by teachers' insensitivity. Teachers' insensitivity toward disabled students may stem, at least non part, from their own lack of knowledge or expertise in the field
 - Social Access: Equally important to having physical access to a school is having social access. Schools must make room for the wide range of linguistic, social, and economic backgrounds of their students. A child may feel out of place in a tribal school if the state language is used for instruction beginning in elementary school. Final RTA SSA Report (page 7) It might be difficult for children with disabilities to continue their education if they come from low-income or illiterate homes since they may not have someone to help them with their schoolwork.
 3. Difficulties to relate to schools: Some educators may be aware that some students may not learn due to disabilities. Able to keep up with the rest of the class, although they may not pay attention to a child with an impairment if there are too many students in the class. A child's enthusiasm for learning may wane as a result of this.
 4. Shortage of Special Teachers: Despite the abundance of government and non-government organization-sponsored teacher training courses for special school teachers, many instructors prefer to teach in large cities, leading to a shortage of special school teachers in rural and isolated locations. Many schools for the disabled are underfunded, making it difficult to pay teachers a living wage. Teachers are discouraged by the lower remuneration at these institutions, and some only stay for a year or two. Due to a lack of qualified educators, many public elementary and secondary school teachers are juggling multiple classes at once. At the same time, this affects the standard of education for kids with special needs.

9. GOVERNMENT POLICIES

9.1 Fund issues:

Many states are yet to submit reports on the aids they have undertaken, and they have yet to submit utilization certificates for funds released, causing unbalanced in the release of additional funds even after PMEG (Project Monitoring and Evaluation Group) approval to continue further work. (Julka, 10th july 2015)

9.2 A lack of communication between departments:

There are problems with coordination, a lack of a defined policy, and wasted effort since The administration has divided up accountability or education over several ministries and departments. Those with special needs in special education fall under the purview of the Ministry of Social Justice Empowerment, while those in regular education fall under the purview of the Ministry of Human Resource Department. The former provides funding for special schools, while the latter works toward creating an inclusive environment. One major obstacle is the government's historically piecemeal reaction to the diverse needs it has identified among youngsters. Additionally, there is a lack of cooperation between the government, NGOs, and communities in their efforts to converge and identify children with special needs early on.

9.3 Lack of severity:

Children with impairments who could have benefited from mainstream education are being denied that opportunity because lawmakers failed to distinguish between the requirements of children with mild, moderate, and severe disabilities.

9.4 Curriculum:

To encourage inclusivity, a specialized curriculum has been developed for kids with disabilities. This includes linguistic accommodations for kids with hearing loss and speech therapy for kids with cerebral palsy. These kids may have a tough time grasping the fundamentals when they enter mainstream education. In order to ensure that students with special needs have equal access to both the regular and special curricula, the latter must be adapted to the various ways in which the former is delivered. Sunday, March 8 (Kohama)

10. CONCLUSION

Many obstacles stand in the way of kids with impairments realizing their full potential. The families of these children, especially the poor and those subjected to other forms of shame, are often under a great deal of stress as a result of the various difficulties they must overcome. For disabled children, the lack of or inadequate access to vocational training is a major impediment to breaking the cycle of poverty. They have a greater propensity to be poor and are more at risk of being marginalized by society as a whole. The dominant policy in India is reflected in the current trends in service delivery. A tendency toward segregation existed prior to the 1970s. But changing perspectives on disability—from a focus on charity to one centered on human rights—have led to disparities in policy and practice. Governments and NGOs have made strides to ensure that children with disabilities have equal access to education, but there is still much work to be done.

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