

EXPLORING TEACHERS' PERSPECTIVES ON INCLUSIVE EDUCATION PRACTICES IN RURAL SCHOOLS OF CHAKDAHA BLOCK, WEST BENGAL

		
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Abstract

Inclusive education aims to provide equitable learning opportunities for all students, regardless of their physical, intellectual, social, emotional, linguistic, or other conditions (UNESCO, 2020; Booth & Ainscow, 2016). In the context of rural India, the implementation of inclusive education presents unique challenges and opportunities due to socio-economic, infrastructural, and attitudinal factors (Kumar & Kaur, 2019; Singal, 2019). This qualitative study explores the perspectives of school teachers working in rural schools of Chakdahaha Block, Nadia District, West Bengal, regarding the practices, challenges, and possibilities of inclusive education. Using in-depth interviews and thematic analysis, the study captures the lived experiences of 15 primary and upper primary school teachers from both government and aided institutions. Findings reveal that while teachers largely support the philosophy of inclusive education, they often struggle with insufficient training, lack of resources, and minimal community awareness (Das, Kuyini, & Desai, 2013; Sharma, Loreman, & Forlin, 2012). However, some educators demonstrate innovative strategies to include diverse learners using locally available materials and collaborative support systems (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011; Subban & Sharma, 2006). The study also highlights the role of policy awareness, community involvement, and administrative support in promoting inclusion (NCERT, 2020; Government of India, 2009; West Bengal School Education Department, 2021). This research contributes to the broader discourse on inclusive education in rural Indian contexts and emphasizes the need for continuous teacher training, policy enforcement, and culturally relevant pedagogical tools to strengthen inclusive practices (Ainscow, 2020; Pantic & Florian, 2015).

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1.0 Introduction

Inclusive education is a transformative approach that aims to ensure equal educational opportunities for all learners, regardless of their abilities, backgrounds, or socio-economic status (UNESCO, 2020; Ainscow, 2020). In the context of India's diverse educational landscape, the implementation of inclusive practices becomes particularly critical in rural areas, where resources are limited, and educational inequities persist (Kumar & Kaur, 2019; Singal, 2019). The Right to Education (RTE) Act and national policy frameworks such as the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 have emphasized the importance of inclusive education (Government of India, 2009; Ministry of Education, 2020). However, the successful realization of inclusion depends largely on the perspectives, preparedness, and active participation of teachers who are the frontline implementers in the classroom (Sharma et al., 2012; Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011).

In rural settings like Chakdaha Block in Nadia District, West Bengal, inclusive education often faces significant challenges related to infrastructure, teacher training, student diversity, and socio-cultural attitudes (Das et al., 2013; West Bengal School Education Department, 2021). Despite the growing discourse around inclusive education, there remains a lack of empirical research that examines how rural school teachers perceive and implement inclusive practices in their everyday teaching (Pantic & Florian, 2015). Understanding these perspectives is essential to identifying the strengths, gaps, and areas that need support in the education system.

This study, therefore, seeks to explore the real-world experiences of rural school teachers, uncovering their insights, challenges, and strategies in implementing inclusive education. By focusing on teachers' voices in the rural schools of Chakdaha Block, the research aims to provide context-specific knowledge that can inform policy implementation, teacher training programs, and inclusive pedagogy at the grassroots level (Booth & Ainscow, 2016; Subban & Sharma, 2006).

1.1 Significance of the Study

This study holds considerable significance in the field of education, particularly in understanding and improving inclusive education practices in rural India. While inclusive education is a key component of national educational policy, its effective implementation remains a challenge in rural areas where infrastructural limitations, lack of teacher training, and socio-cultural factors act as barriers. By focusing on the perspectives of teachers in the Chakdaha Block of West Bengal, this study provides context-specific insights into how inclusion is perceived and practiced at the grassroots level. Teachers are the primary facilitators of inclusive classrooms, and their reflections reveal the ground realities, practical strategies, and unmet needs in the system. The findings of this research can inform policymakers, educational planners, and school administrators about the actual conditions in

rural schools, leading to better training programs, support systems, and policy interventions. Additionally, it contributes to academic discourse by filling a gap in qualitative, teacher-centered research on inclusion in rural educational contexts. The study also serves as a resource for teacher educators and NGOs working in the field of inclusive education, helping them design more effective, locally relevant interventions.

1.2 Objectives of the Study

1. To understand rural teachers' perceptions of inclusive education in the context of Chakdaha Block, West Bengal.
2. To explore the strategies used by teachers to manage diversity and inclusion in rural classrooms.
3. To identify the challenges faced by teachers in implementing inclusive education in rural schools.
4. To assess the level of institutional, administrative, and community support available for inclusive practices.
5. To gather suggestions from teachers on improving inclusive education in rural areas.

1.3 Research Questions

1. How do rural school teachers perceive the concept and goals of inclusive education?
2. What strategies do teachers use to address the learning needs of diverse students in inclusive classrooms?
3. What are the major challenges faced by teachers in implementing inclusive education in rural schools?
4. How adequate is the support from school administration, government schemes, and the community in promoting inclusion?
5. What recommendations do teachers offer to strengthen inclusive education in rural contexts?

2.0 Research Methodology of Study

The present study adopts a **Qualitative research design** to deeply explore the lived experiences, opinions, and reflections of school teachers on inclusive education practices in the rural context of Chakdaha Block, West Bengal. Inclusive education is a critical and evolving aspect of contemporary schooling, especially in under-resourced rural areas, where systemic, cultural, and infrastructural challenges shape its implementation. Hence, a qualitative approach was chosen to allow a rich, in-depth understanding of these practices from the perspectives of those directly engaged in the teaching-learning process.

The **need for the study** arises from the observed disparity between inclusive education policy and actual classroom practices in rural government and government-aided schools. While inclusive education is a national priority, its ground-level enactment often depends heavily on the attitudes, preparedness, and contextual understanding of schoolteachers. This study aims to bridge the knowledge gap by capturing teachers' narratives, challenges faced, adaptive strategies used, and suggestions for improvement.

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This research is **Exploratory in nature** and utilizes a **Phenomenological approach**, focusing on how teachers perceive and experience inclusive practices in real-time classroom environments. Phenomenology is appropriate here as it enables the exploration of human experiences in their natural settings and provides insights into how individuals interpret these experiences in relation to broader educational policies and societal expectations.

The **sample design** of the study is purposive in nature. A total of **20 in-service teachers** have been selected from **five rural government and government-aided schools** across Dewli, Silinda-I, Hingnara, Tatla, and Rautari Gram Panchayats of Chakdaha Block. Teachers were selected based on their direct involvement in handling classrooms that include children with diverse needs—such as children with disabilities, first-generation learners, and students from marginalized socio-economic backgrounds.

For **data collection**, **semi-structured interviews** were conducted using an open-ended interview schedule that focused on key thematic areas: understanding of inclusion, strategies for managing diverse learners, infrastructural and administrative support, teacher training, community involvement, and perceived barriers and enablers of inclusive practices. In addition, **focused group discussions (FGDs)** were also held with teachers to encourage collective reflection and peer dialogue, allowing the researcher to identify patterns and contrasting views.

The **data collected were analyzed thematically** using coding procedures to identify recurring patterns, categories, and themes. A **manual method of thematic analysis** was applied, wherein each interview transcript was read multiple times, and codes were assigned to significant responses. These codes were then grouped into themes that aligned with the research objectives. Triangulation of data through interviews and FGDs enhanced the credibility and reliability of the findings.

The study is **delimited to rural government and government-aided schools of Chakdaha Block**, and focuses solely on teachers' perspectives, not including administrators, students, or parents. The **limitations** of the study include the small sample size, reliance on self-reported data, and the context-specific findings that may not be generalizable to urban or other rural settings.

In conclusion, this research methodology provides a comprehensive and context-sensitive approach to understanding inclusive education in rural West Bengal. The voices of rural teachers, captured through qualitative inquiry, offer valuable insights for policymakers, teacher-educators, and inclusive education advocates aiming to strengthen equity and inclusion in the Indian education system.

3.0 Analysis and Interpretation of Study

3.1 Objective 1: To understand rural teachers' perceptions of inclusive education in the context of Chakdaha Block, West Bengal

Analysis & Interpretation:

Teachers in rural schools of Chakdaha Block demonstrated a basic conceptual understanding of inclusive education, often associating it with teaching children with disabilities. However, their perceptions were largely shaped by their lived experiences, with many viewing inclusion as a challenge due to lack of resources and training. Some viewed inclusive education as a moral responsibility, while others saw it as an added burden in already crowded classrooms.

Significance:

Understanding teacher perceptions helps reveal whether inclusive education is seen as a practical goal or an idealistic policy. Teachers' attitudes directly affect how inclusion is implemented in the classroom.

Impact:

The study highlights the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical understanding among rural teachers, calling for more localized training and sensitization programs.

Assessment:

This objective underlines the need for attitudinal change through continuous professional development, awareness campaigns, and inclusion-focused curricula in teacher education.

3.2 Objective 2: To explore the strategies used by teachers to manage diversity and inclusion in rural classrooms**Analysis & Interpretation:**

Teachers reported using differentiated instruction, peer support systems, group learning, and personal mentoring as strategies to include diverse learners. However, these strategies were often applied inconsistently due to a lack of formal training and time constraints.

Significance:

Identifying these classroom strategies gives insight into the adaptability of rural teachers despite structural constraints. It showcases their creativity and commitment to inclusive practices.

Impact:

The findings emphasize the need to integrate inclusive pedagogical training into in-service and pre-service teacher education programs.

Assessment:

This objective shows that while some grassroots strategies are effective, their impact is limited by the absence of structured guidance. Standardized inclusive teaching modules can strengthen these efforts.

3.3 Objective 3: To identify the challenges faced by teachers in implementing inclusive education in rural schools



Analysis & Interpretation:

Key challenges reported included lack of proper infrastructure, insufficient teaching-learning materials, absence of special educators, oversized classrooms, and inadequate training. Societal stigma toward disability and lack of parental awareness also hindered inclusive practices.

Significance:

Recognizing these challenges is essential for designing support mechanisms and policies that are rooted in ground realities rather than top-down assumptions.

Impact:

The study underscores how systemic and infrastructural shortcomings create major obstacles, which, if not addressed, can derail the goals of inclusive education.

Assessment:

The objective calls for a multi-pronged policy response involving infrastructure upgrades, regular teacher training, and community engagement initiatives to overcome the identified barriers.

3.4 Objective 4: To assess the level of institutional, administrative, and community support available for inclusive practices

Analysis & Interpretation:

Teachers reported minimal institutional and administrative support. There was little monitoring, irregular workshops, and rare collaboration with resource personnel. Community involvement was limited, often due to a lack of awareness or misconceptions about inclusion.

Significance:

This objective reveals how inclusion is not only a pedagogical issue but also a structural and social concern, requiring support beyond the classroom.

Impact:

The findings show that successful implementation of inclusion demands a collaborative effort between schools, administrators, and the local community.

Assessment:

Capacity-building efforts must focus on strengthening institutional frameworks and community awareness to create an enabling environment for inclusive education.

3.5 Objective 5: To gather suggestions from teachers on improving inclusive education in rural areas

Analysis & Interpretation:



Teachers suggested regular training, recruitment of special educators, provision of teaching aids, curriculum modification, and increased community awareness as key measures. They also emphasized the need for psychological support and counseling services in schools.

Significance:

Teachers' suggestions are vital because they offer practical, experience-based solutions that are directly applicable to their context.

Impact:

Implementing teacher-driven recommendations can ensure that inclusive policies are not only well-intentioned but also actionable and sustainable.

Assessment:

This objective highlights the value of participatory policy-making and the importance of listening to teachers as co-creators of inclusive educational practices.

4.0 Findings of Study

4.1 Research Question 1:

How do rural school teachers perceive the concept and goals of inclusive education?

Findings:

- ❖ Most teachers associate inclusive education primarily with the integration of children with disabilities into mainstream classrooms, while some also extend it to include students from marginalized and disadvantaged backgrounds (e.g., economically weaker sections, first-generation learners).
- ❖ There is a general positive attitude toward inclusion, with many teachers viewing it as a necessary step toward social equality and education for all.
- ❖ However, the understanding of the broader goals of inclusive education (equity, participation, respect for diversity) remains limited due to lack of proper orientation and training.
- ❖ Some teachers express concern about their preparedness to teach students with special needs due to inadequate training and support.

Research Question 2:

4.2 What strategies do teachers use to address the learning needs of diverse students in inclusive classrooms?

Findings:

- ❖ Teachers commonly adopt **peer tutoring, group work, and activity-based learning** to address the varied learning needs of students.
- ❖ Simplified teaching materials, use of visual aids, and multilingual explanations are also used to assist learners with differing levels of understanding.
- ❖ Some teachers develop informal Individualized Education Plans (IEPs), although they lack technical expertise in special pedagogy.
- ❖ Despite their best efforts, many strategies are improvised rather than systematically planned, largely due to limited access to training and inclusive teaching resources.

Research Question 3:

4.3 What are the major challenges faced by teachers in implementing inclusive education in rural schools?

Findings:

- ❖ **Lack of infrastructure**, such as ramps, accessible toilets, and classroom space, was reported as a major hindrance.
- ❖ **Large class sizes and high teacher-student ratios** make individualized attention difficult.
- ❖ Teachers reported minimal **pre-service or in-service training** on inclusive pedagogy or disability awareness.
- ❖ There is a notable **absence of special educators** or resource persons to support mainstream teachers.
- ❖ **Social stigma** and lack of awareness among parents often lead to resistance or neglect of inclusive efforts.
- ❖ Administrative indifference and irregular supervision further demotivate teachers.

Research Question 4:

4.4 How adequate is the support from school administration, government schemes, and the community in promoting inclusion?

Findings:

- ❖ Administrative support is inconsistent; some schools make efforts through SSA/RTE initiatives, while others lack structured plans for inclusion.
- ❖ **Government schemes**, though available (e.g., scholarships for CWSN, midday meals, free textbooks), are often poorly implemented or not well-publicized.
- ❖ School heads and administrators are often unaware of inclusive education policies or fail to prioritize them due to other pressing issues.
- ❖ Community involvement is weak, with many parents unaware of their children's rights to inclusive education. Community engagement is further limited by poverty, illiteracy, and cultural misconceptions.
- ❖ Teachers feel isolated in their efforts due to a lack of collaborative support.

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Research Question 5:

4.5 What recommendations do teachers offer to strengthen inclusive education in rural contexts?

Findings:

- ❖ Teachers advocate for **regular and specialized training** programs focusing on inclusive teaching techniques, classroom management, and disability sensitization.
- ❖ Suggestions include **appointing special educators**, developing inclusive **curriculum content**, and **reducing class sizes**.
- ❖ There is a demand for **better infrastructure**, including assistive technology and learning aids.
- ❖ Teachers recommend stronger **monitoring and support** from school management and educational officers.
- ❖ **Parent awareness programs** and **community outreach** were emphasized to build inclusive mindsets.
- ❖ Teachers also stressed the importance of **counseling services** and **peer mentoring systems** in schools.

5.0 Suggestions and Recommendations

❖ Strengthen Teacher Training on Inclusive Pedagogy

Regular, context-specific training programs should be organized to equip rural teachers with practical skills to manage diverse learners. Training should include inclusive classroom strategies, use of low-cost teaching aids, and methods for differentiated instruction.

❖ Develop Resource Support Systems

Government and local authorities should ensure the provision of teaching-learning materials, assistive devices, and infrastructural accommodations (like ramps and accessible toilets) in rural schools to support children with diverse needs.

❖ Incorporate Inclusive Education in Pre-Service Teacher Education

Inclusive education should be integrated into B.Ed. and D.El.Ed. curricula so that future teachers are well-prepared from the beginning of their careers to work in diverse classroom settings.

❖ Community Sensitization Programs

Awareness campaigns and community engagement initiatives should be conducted to educate parents and local stakeholders about the value of inclusive education and their role in supporting it.

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❖ **Strengthen School Leadership and Administrative Support**

School heads and administrative officials must be trained and sensitized to foster an inclusive school environment. Leadership support is essential for implementing inclusive policies and motivating teachers.

❖ **Promote Peer Collaboration and Teacher Networks**

Rural teachers should be encouraged to form peer support groups or networks to share resources, teaching strategies, and problem-solving practices related to inclusion.

❖ **Monitor and Evaluate Implementation**

Inclusive education practices should be regularly monitored and assessed through structured evaluation tools to identify gaps and improve delivery. Teachers should receive feedback and support rather than punitive measures.

❖ **Leverage Technology for Inclusion**

ICT-based solutions such as audio-visual content, mobile learning apps, and digital classrooms can be adapted for inclusive teaching, especially for children with hearing, speech, or learning disabilities.

❖ **Policy Reinforcement and Local Adaptation**

National and state-level inclusive education policies should be effectively localized with clear implementation guidelines suited to the rural context. Flexibility should be allowed to address area-specific challenges.

❖ **Involve Special Educators and Multi-Disciplinary Teams**

Collaborative involvement of special educators, speech therapists, and counselors can help address specific learning and behavioral needs of children in rural inclusive classrooms.

6.0 Conclusion

The study provides a comprehensive insight into the perceptions, practices, challenges, and recommendations of rural teachers concerning inclusive education in the Chakdaha Block of West Bengal. Findings reveal that while most teachers acknowledge the value of inclusive education and show a positive disposition toward its implementation, their understanding of the concept remains narrowly focused on disability inclusion. In the absence of formal training and adequate resources, many rely on personal improvisation and experience to address classroom diversity.

Teachers face a multitude of challenges, including infrastructural limitations, large class sizes, lack of administrative and community support, and insufficient professional development opportunities. While various governmental schemes and policies exist to support inclusive

education, their effectiveness is hindered by gaps in implementation and awareness at the grassroots level.

Nevertheless, the study highlights the resilience and dedication of rural teachers who strive to foster inclusive environments with minimal support. Their recommendations—ranging from better training and infrastructure to stronger administrative engagement and community participation—reflect a clear understanding of what is required to build inclusive schools. The study emphasizes the urgent need for systemic reforms that bridge the policy-practice gap, empower teachers through capacity building, and foster collaborative efforts among schools, families, and communities.

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