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A Study of Barriers in the Implementation of Inclusive Education as Perceived by Secondary School Teachers in Bihar

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Abstract - Inclusive education seeks to provide equitable learning opportunities for all students, including those with disabilities and from socio-economically disadvantaged groups, within mainstream classrooms. In Bihar, one of India's most educationally challenged states, secondary school teachers encounter multiple barriers that hinder the effective implementation of inclusive education policies such as the Right to Education (RTE) Act 2009, the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (RPwD) Act 2016, Samagra Shiksha, and the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020. This paper examines the barriers perceived by secondary school teachers in Bihar through a synthesis of empirical studies, official data (UDISE+, SSA reports), and research on teacher perceptions. Major barriers identified include inadequate infrastructure and accessibility, insufficient teacher training and pedagogical preparedness, large class sizes and high pupil-teacher ratios, attitudinal and socio-cultural challenges (including caste bias and stigma), rigid curriculum and assessment systems, shortage of special educators and support staff, limited assistive technology and resources, and weak policy implementation and monitoring. The paper discusses the implications of these barriers for classroom practices and student outcomes and offers recommendations for systemic improvement. Strengthening teacher capacity, infrastructure, collaborative support structures, and accountability mechanisms is essential for translating inclusive policy into meaningful secondary-level practice in Bihar.

Keywords: Inclusive education; Barriers to inclusion; Secondary school teachers; Bihar; Infrastructure and accessibility; Teacher training; Right to Education Act; Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act; National Education Policy 2020; Samagra Shiksha; Children with Special Needs (CWSN).

I. INTRODUCTION

Inclusive education is a fundamental right under Indian law and a cornerstone of equitable development. Bihar, with its large rural population, high poverty levels, significant Scheduled Caste and minority populations, and historically low educational indicators, faces acute challenges in realizing this right at the secondary stage. Secondary education is a critical bottleneck: limited number of secondary schools, high dropout rates, severe shortage of subject teachers, and inadequate facilities for Children with Special Needs (CWSN) compound the difficulties. Teachers are the primary agents of implementation. Their perceptions of barriers directly influence whether inclusive policies remain rhetorical or become classroom realities. This study explores the barriers to inclusive education as perceived by secondary school teachers in Bihar, drawing on available research, state-level data, and teacher-reported challenges. Understanding these perceptions is vital for designing targeted interventions under NEP 2020 and ongoing Samagra Shiksha programmes.

II. CONCEPTUAL AND POLICY CONTEXT

Inclusive education in India has evolved from segregation and integration toward full inclusion. The RTE Act (2009, amended) mandates free and compulsory education and non-discrimination. The RPwD Act 2016 defines inclusive education as a system in which students with and without disabilities learn together with appropriate adaptations. NEP 2020 emphasizes equitable and inclusive education for Socio-Economically Disadvantaged Groups (SEDGs), including CWSN, and calls for barrier-free access, teacher capacity building, and flexible curricula.

In Bihar, initiatives under Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (now Samagra Shiksha) include identification of CWSN, provision of aids and appliances, residential bridge courses, and some training. However, official data reveal persistent gaps: functional CWSN toilets are available in only about 14.7% of schools (against a national average of around 32%), ramps are present in fewer than 30% of government schools in many districts, and trained teachers for inclusive practices remain scarce, particularly in rural areas. Secondary education faces additional structural constraints. Bihar has a disproportionately low share of secondary schools and secondary-level teachers compared to national averages, creating progression bottlenecks and high pupil-teacher ratios in available institutions.

III. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

National and international literature consistently identifies teacher-related and systemic barriers to inclusion: inadequate pre-service and in-service training, lack of resources, large class sizes, negative attitudes, rigid curricula, and insufficient specialist support. Studies specific to India highlight that many teachers support inclusion in principle but feel unprepared in practice. Research in Bihar and similar contexts points to additional layers of caste-based discrimination, parental reluctance, infrastructure deficits, and administrative gaps. Teacher attitude studies in Bihar (including Gaya and Patna districts) indicate moderately favourable attitudes overall, with pre-service and urban teachers often more positive than in-service and rural counterparts. However, secondary teachers frequently report that the curriculum is not inclusion-friendly and that infrastructure and training are major constraints. Special educators in Bihar and Maharashtra have reported limited recruitment of itinerant teachers, outdated training, and unfavourable working conditions, leading to attrition. Caste bias in teacher evaluation of students has been documented in Bihar public schools, where forward-caste teachers systematically underrate the performance of backward-caste students relative to objective test scores. Such attitudinal barriers intersect with disability-related stigma, compounding exclusion for the most marginalized learners.

IV. METHODOLOGY AND SCOPE

This paper is a descriptive and analytical synthesis based on secondary sources: UDISE+ data, Bihar SSA/Samagra Shiksha reports, peer-reviewed studies on teacher perceptions in Bihar and India, government documents, and recent research on barriers to inclusive education. It focuses on secondary school teachers' perceptions as reported in surveys, interviews, and district-level studies (including Patna, Gaya, Purnia, and other districts). Barriers are categorized thematically for clarity. While primary data collection was not undertaken for this paper, the synthesis reflects the recurrent themes in teachers' voices across available empirical work.

V. BARRIERS PERCEIVED BY SECONDARY SCHOOL TEACHERS IN BIHAR

- **Infrastructural and Accessibility Barriers** - Teachers widely report that physical infrastructure does not support inclusion. Functional ramps are available in only 23–28% of schools in sample districts such as Gaya and Purnia. CWSN-friendly toilets remain scarce (around 14.7% statewide). Science laboratories, libraries, and upper floors are often inaccessible to students with mobility impairments. Absence of barrier-free pathways, appropriate furniture, and basic accessibility features forces many CWSN to remain excluded or dependent on peers/family for entry. Teachers note that even when a student with disability is enrolled, the physical environment signals that the school is not designed for them.
- **Inadequate Teacher Training and Pedagogical Preparedness** - A dominant perception is the lack of proper training. Studies indicate that fewer than 12% of rural teachers in Bihar have received formal training on inclusive education. Pre-service programmes often provide minimal exposure to diverse needs, differentiation strategies, or classroom management for mixed-ability groups. In-service workshops, when conducted, are frequently short, one-off, and lacking follow-up mentoring. Secondary teachers, already subject specialists, feel particularly unprepared to adapt content for visual, hearing, intellectual, or behavioural needs while covering examination-oriented syllabi. Teachers report low confidence in assessment adaptations, individualized education planning, and use of multi-sensory methods.

- **Large Class Sizes, High Pupil-Teacher Ratios, and Time Constraints** - Overcrowded classrooms are a recurrent complaint. Adverse pupil-teacher ratios and multi-grade or multi-level teaching in many government secondary schools leave little time for individualized attention. Teachers state that accommodating a student with special needs requires additional planning and classroom time that is simply unavailable amid syllabus completion pressure and administrative duties. Secondary-level examination focus intensifies this constraint.
- **Shortage of Special Educators and Support Staff** - Recruitment of school-based or itinerant special educators has been limited or stalled in periods since 2012–13 in several states, including Bihar. Teachers perceive isolation: they lack on-site specialist consultation, co-teaching opportunities, or resource-room support. When special educators are available, their roles are often restricted to identification, aids distribution, or limited remedial input rather than sustained classroom collaboration.
- **Attitudinal and Socio-Cultural Barriers** - Teachers themselves acknowledge, or are observed to hold, mixed attitudes. Stigma surrounding disability, low expectations of CWSN, and caste-based biases affect classroom interactions. Research in Bihar documents evaluation bias against backward-caste students and residual practices of social distance toward marginalized communities (including Musahar and other Dalit groups). Parents of non-disabled students sometimes resist inclusion, fearing dilution of academic standards or behavioural disruption. Teachers report parental reluctance to send children with disabilities to mainstream secondary schools and limited community awareness. These attitudes create a climate in which inclusion is tolerated rather than actively pursued.
- **Rigid Curriculum, Assessment, and Pedagogical Practices** - Secondary teachers frequently perceive the curriculum as non-inclusive. Examination-driven systems leave little flexibility for alternative assessment, modified content, or extended time. Teaching-learning materials suited to diverse needs (Braille, large print, simplified texts, tactile materials) are scarce. Assistive technology is largely unavailable or unknown to most teachers; awareness of even medium- and high-end devices remains low. Traditional chalk-and-talk methods dominate, making differentiation difficult.
- **Resource and Funding Constraints** - Limited budgets for teaching-learning materials, aids and appliances, and professional development are commonly cited. Teachers report competing demands on scarce school funds and delays in supply of materials for CWSN. Digital resources and computers, where present, are rarely adapted for accessibility.
- **Policy Implementation and Administrative Gaps** - Despite progressive policies, teachers perceive weak monitoring, unclear role clarity between general and special educators, bureaucratic delays in certification and support services, and insufficient accountability for inclusive outcomes. Identification of CWSN has improved through drives, yet transition to sustained secondary participation remains weak. High dropout among marginalized groups, including Dalit girls, reflects cumulative barriers.

VI. IMPACT ON CLASSROOM PRACTICES AND STUDENT OUTCOMES

These barriers result in minimal adaptations in most secondary classrooms. Differentiation is rare; students with disabilities may be physically present but academically and socially peripheral. Teachers may resort to referral to special settings or informal exclusion. Learning outcomes for CWSN remain low, peer acceptance is limited, and overall classroom climate may reinforce rather than challenge stigma. Marginalized students without formal disability labels (e.g., those facing caste or poverty-related disadvantages) also suffer from lowered expectations and reduced instructional investment.

VII. DISCUSSION

The barriers are interconnected. Infrastructure deficits and large classes amplify the effects of inadequate training; attitudinal issues reduce demand for resources and training; policy gaps perpetuate resource shortages. Secondary education's subject specialization and high-stakes assessment make inclusion particularly demanding compared with primary stages. Bihar's socio-economic context—poverty, rural dominance, caste hierarchies—adds layers of complexity not fully addressed by generic national guidelines. Teachers' perceptions reflect genuine systemic constraints rather than mere resistance; many express willingness to include students if adequately supported.

VIII. RECOMMENDATIONS -

1. Mandatory, sustained, school-based professional development on inclusive pedagogy, with mentoring and peer learning communities, prioritising secondary subject teachers.
2. Accelerated investment in barrier-free infrastructure (ramps, CWSN toilets, accessible laboratories) and assistive technology, with clear targets and monitoring under Samagra Shiksha.
3. Systematic recruitment and deployment of special educators/itinerant teachers and establishment of collaborative co-teaching models.
4. Curriculum and assessment flexibility at secondary level, including alternative evaluation pathways aligned with NEP 2020.
5. Targeted interventions addressing caste and disability stigma through teacher sensitisation, community mobilisation, and inclusive school cultures.
6. Strengthened monitoring of inclusive indicators (enrolment, retention, learning outcomes of CWSN and SEDGs) with teacher feedback loops.
7. Reduction of class sizes and rationalisation of secondary teacher deployment.
8. Greater involvement of teachers in local planning under District and Block Resource Centres.

IX. CONCLUSION -

Secondary school teachers in Bihar perceive a complex web of barriers—infrastructural, professional, attitudinal, curricular, and systemic—that severely constrain the implementation of inclusive education. While policy frameworks are progressive, ground-level realities of inaccessible schools, unprepared teachers, overcrowded classrooms, resource scarcity, and socio-cultural biases prevent meaningful inclusion. Addressing these barriers requires coordinated action across infrastructure, human resource development, pedagogical reform, and accountability. Only then can secondary education in Bihar move from rhetorical commitment to inclusive practice that enables every learner to participate, learn, and succeed with dignity.

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