Addressing Disparities: Evaluating the Preparedness of Uttarakhand's Education System for Inclusive Education

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Abstract

This study analyzes the present situation and preparedness of Uttarakhand's education system for inclusive education, focusing on the integration of Children with Special Needs (CwSN). Even after the enhancement of global and national advocacy for inclusive education, significant challenges remain, particularly in rural and remote regions of developing countries like India. Similarly, Uttarakhand, characterised by its unique geographical terrain and sociocultural dynamics, faces considerable challenges in effectively implementing disability-inclusive education. This study analysed key aspects such as the number of CwSN, enrolment and out-of-school rates, funding, infrastructure, teacher perspectives and training, and sociocultural barriers. The study analyses reports of the Unified District Information System for Education (UDISE) and Census 2011, which show that the state is at the inception stage, especially with the lowest inclusion rate in the country, including a decline in CwSN enrolment and persistent gender disparities. Furthermore, the infrastructure, though improving, still lacks functionality, particularly in the availability of CwSN-friendly facilities like toilets and ramps with handrails. The research highlights that despite policy efforts, the actualisation of inclusive education remains deficient in Uttarakhand, especially in its rural areas. This study underscores the need for targeted interventions that bridge the gap between policy and practice, ensuring that all students, including those with special needs, receive equitable and sustainable educational opportunities.

Keywords: Inclusive Education, Uttarakhand, Children with Special Needs, Equality, Inclusivity.

Introduction

Inclusive education has long been a focal point of academic discourse, particularly in pedagogy, educator training, and global educational policy. This subject is deeply embedded in contemporary dialogues surrounding human and democratic rights, such as equality and justice, especially for communities that have been historically marginalised and subjected to systemic inequities. Despite decades of advocacy and policy intervention, the socio-economic conditions of these communities, especially for persons with disabilities (PWD), remain far from commendable, underscoring the ongoing relevance and urgency of inclusive education as a means to address these enduring disparities. An estimated 1.3 billion people experience significant disability, representing 16% of the world's population, or 1 in 6 (WHO, 2023), which has sparked global policies, practices, and research aimed at promoting equity and inclusivity in educational access across diverse systems (Ainscow, 2020); for instance, the Salamanca Statement (1994) and the Sustainable Development Goals (2015) have provisions for an inclusive educational setting.

This prompted nations to embark on the journey toward inclusive and equitable education by crafting policies, initiatives, and programs tailored to their unique challenges and dynamics of their countries. As a developing nation, India has undertaken concerted efforts to foster an inclusive educational environment for its diverse population through a series of policies and initiatives. However, despite these efforts, research on inclusive education across national contexts remains underdeveloped, particularly marginalising knowledge from rural and remote settings (Sharma et al., 2017). This is especially true in a developing nation like ours, where certain regions have rural and remote areas where a single school serves the entire community. If this school does not meet the needs of all children, including those with special needs, it undermines the constitutional mandate for universal elementary education (Jangira, 1997).

In this context, Uttarakhand, a state distinguished by its unique geographical terrain and rich cultural diversity, faces significant challenges in establishing a sustainable educational system. The prevalence of 'ghost villages' resulting from substantial migration to urban centres underscores the demographic shifts within the region. Concurrently, numerous government schools are facing the threat of closure as parents increasingly opt for private educational institutions, largely due to concerns regarding the substandard quality of public education (Bora, 2014; Barthwal, 2014). This situation prompts a critical inquiry: How adequately prepared is Uttarakhand's education system to fulfil the demands of inclusive learning? The state's educational framework must navigate complex obstacles, including the physical difficulties imposed by its mountainous landscapes and the sociocultural factors that influence perceptions. of disability and education. Shah et al. (2017) indicate that disability rates are higher among males (2.65%) compared to females (1.79%), highlighting gender disparities in health reporting and access to services. Moreover, women with disabilities endure compounded discrimination based on gender and impairment. Families headed by individuals with disabilities often experience heightened levels of poverty, lower educational attainment, and poorer health outcomes, with alarming rates of illiteracy, unemployment, and poverty prevalent among these populations in Uttarakhand.

According to the Census 2011 data, there has been an increase in the population of children with special needs (CwSN) in both rural and urban areas (Table 01). CwSN in the 0-6 years category is 6.59% in Uttarakhand, while more than 24 percent of the CwSN falling in the age category 5-19 suffer from some form of disability.

Table 1 Disability Distribution in Uttarakhand and India 2011

	Total Disabled	Seeing	Hearing	Speech	Movement	Mental Retardation	Mental Illness	Any Other	Multiple Disability
Uttarakhand	185272	29107	37681	12348	36996	11450	6443	30723	20524
India	26810557	5032463	5071007	19985355	5436604	1505624	722826	4927011	2116487

Source: Census of India 2011, Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities. Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, Government of India

The main objective of this study is to critically evaluate the preparedness of Uttarakhand's education system for inclusive education, with particular emphasis on the enrollment of Children with Special Needs (CwSN), infrastructural adequacy, teacher preparedness, and policy implementation. It also aims to identify systemic gaps and propose context-specific interventions to bridge the divide between policies and practices. Despite progress in policy adoption and increasing awareness, persistent deficiencies in areas such as infrastructure, professional training, and socio-cultural attitudes highlight the urgent need for targeted measures to ensure equitable and sustainable educational opportunities for all learners.

Literature Review

Research on disability and inclusive education in Uttarakhand and India highlights multiple dimensions that influence access, participation, and equity for Children with Special Needs (CwSN).

Gahtori (2020), through an analysis of the 2001 and 2011 census data, reported that the prevalence of disability in Uttarakhand is lower than the national average, with a higher concentration in rural areas. While literacy rates among Persons with Disabilities (PWDs) remain low overall, Uttarakhand performs marginally better than the national average. The proportion of disabled children aged 0–6 years in the state (6.59%) is also slightly below the national figure (7.61%).

Bisht et al. (2010) highlighted that the isolation of communities and negative social attitudes toward individuals with disabilities, particularly women, exacerbate exclusion. Shah et al. (2017) further observe the absence of focused research on livelihood opportunities and income-generating interventions, noting that people with disabilities remain among the most vulnerable, with low education levels and limited access to employment.

Rangarajan et al. (2023) stress that the success of inclusive education in rural settings depends on engaging diverse stakeholders, integrating local practices, and addressing intersectional barriers such as gender, caste, and socioeconomic status. Their study underscores the importance of community participation and a strength-based approach, calling for policies sensitive to regional realities.

Teacher perspectives play a pivotal role in implementing inclusive education. Juyal (2022) finds that while preservice teachers in Uttarakhand express positive attitudes toward inclusivity, they face challenges related to limited resources, large student–teacher ratios, and insufficient practical exposure. The study recommends that teacher education programmes integrate hands-on experience, inclusive pedagogy, and greater awareness of diversity in classrooms. Similarly, Taneja et al. (2021) and Forber-Pratt and Sarkar (2021) argued that professional development and attitudinal shifts among teachers are essential for meaningful inclusion.

Recent scholarship highlights the gap between policy commitments and their operationalisation. Verma (2021) assesses the implementation of inclusive education in government schools of Uttarakhand and identifies persistent shortcomings in accessibility and teacher support. Studies such as Bhrigu et al. (2021) also point to stress among teachers arising from inadequate systemic support, further limiting the effective execution of inclusive education.

Collectively, the literature suggests that while policy adoption has progressed, the realisation of inclusive education in Uttarakhand remains constrained by structural deficiencies, gaps in teacher preparedness, and entrenched socio-cultural barriers. More importantly, recent studies emphasise the need for contextualised interventions, stronger teacher education programmes, and community participation to ensure the equitable and sustainable inclusion of CwSN.

Methodology

This study uses a descriptive and analytical research design. The descriptive part presents data on enrollment, infrastructure, teacher readiness, and policies for Children with Special Needs (CwSN). The analytical part helps interpret these findings in light of Uttarakhand's social and geographical conditions, providing a clearer picture of how prepared the education system is for inclusive education. This study focuses on Uttarakhand, especially its rural and remote areas, where difficult terrain, poor infrastructure, and limited resources make implementation more challenging. It also examines how these local issues are connected to wider educational policies and practices.

Data Sources

The study is based entirely on secondary data. The main sources include Unified District Information System for Education (UDISE) reports from 2018 to 2022, which provide information on enrolment and infrastructural facilities, and Census 2011, which remains the most comprehensive source of disability demographics. Additional sources, such as government reports and policy documents, were reviewed to assess financial and institutional provisions. Relevant academic studies, both national and international, were consulted to place the findings within wider debates on inclusive education.

Limitations

This study has certain limitations. Reliance on secondary data restricts the possibility of capturing lived experiences and classroom practices through direct observation or surveys. Although widely used, the 2011 census data are outdated and may not fully reflect the current situation.

Findings

The findings of the study present the current status of inclusive education in Uttarakhand with respect to enrolmentment of Children with Special Needs (CwSN), availability of infrastructure, teacher preparedness, policy implementation, and other related aspects.

Enrollment Status of CwSN in the State

According to the Unified District Information System for Education (UDISE) report for 2021-22, the enrolment of Children with Special Needs (CWSN) constitutes 0.89% of the total student population in India. However, in Uttarakhand, CWSN enrolment stands at only 0.22%, marking the lowest percentage among all states and Union Territories. This figure is significantly below the national average, suggesting potential challenges in educational access, identification, or reporting mechanisms for children with special needs within the state (Table 02).

Table 2 Enrolment and CWSN Enrolment in India and Uttarakhand (2021-22)

Session	Region	Total Enrolment (Grade I to XII)	CWSN Enrolment	%
2021-22	India	255740623	2266794	0.89
	Uttarakhand	2355768	5080	0.22

Source: Ministry of Education (UDISE 2021-22)

The data on Children with Special Needs (CWSN) enrolment in Uttarakhand from 2018-19 to 2021-22 reveals a troubling decline across all educational levels and genders. In 2018-19, the total CWSN enrolment was 6,196 students, but this number steadily decreased to 4,936 by 2021-22, reflecting a significant reduction over four years. Both boys and girls experienced a consistent decline in enrolment, with boys decreasing from 3,518 to 2,771 and girls from 2,678 to 2,165, during this period. This downward trend is evident across all class levels, from primary (Classes 1-5), where enrolment fell from 3,297 to 2,472, to higher secondary (Classes 11-12), where enrolment increased slightly from 422 to 513. The sustained reduction in CWSN enrolment suggests systemic challenges in educational access and retention of these students, potentially due to barriers in support services, socio-economic factors, or other underlying issues that require targeted interventions to ensure inclusivity and equal opportunities for all learners. (Table 03)

Table 3 Gender-Wise CWSN Enrolment across Different Educational Levels in Uttarakhand

Class	1-5		6-8		9-10		11-12		Total
Gender- wise/Session	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	
2018-19	1943	1354	979	759	369	370	227	195	6196
2019-20	1823	1353	853	746	414	353	206	195	5943
2020-21	1584	1144	738	566	432	341	230	193	5228
2021-22	1444	1028	715	611	351	274	261	252	4936

Source: Ministry of Education (UDISE Reports from 2018-2022)

In Uttarakhand from 2011-15 following data indicate the CwSN enrolment status: in the 2011-12 academic session, 21392 CwSN were identified under Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, while 17951 were enrolled in schools and 3441 were provided with home-based education (HBE). In the subsequent year 2012-12 the identification as well as the enrolment increased to 21898 and 18040 respectively while 3028 were still provided with HBE (Shah et al., 2017). The enrolment of CwSN in the year 2014-15 shows a drastic decline, leading to 11860.

CwSN Out of School in Uttarakhand

India has been struggling with the setback of dropouts and out-of-school children, where it has achieved great milestones in the universalisation of primary education; still, NEP 2020 reports it as the most troubling concern. In the case of CwSN, this issue remains a critical challenge nationwide, with one-third of all out-of-school children having special needs. Another alarming fact is that 90 percent of disabled students are not enrolled in schools (Thapli, 2015). Quality education for CwSN is of utmost importance. Recognising this, global organisations have emphasised the need for tailored educational approaches to meet the unique requirements of this diverse cohort (Kohama, 2012). In alignment with this thought, Rajeshwari and Saxena (2014) raised a concern about the high dropout rates of CwSN and how it is imperative to organise and implement concentrated efforts to deliver quality education for their retention in the mainstream of education. The data on out-of-school children (OoSC) who are children with special needs (CWSN) in Uttarakhand for the years 2013-14 to 2016-17 further underscores this issue, highlighting several key points that demand attention: the data of out-of-school CwSN in the year 2013-14 in the state was 1825, which consisted of a higher number of boys (1034), including 791 girls, all of whom were provided with home-based education. While emphasising the HBE programme, Singal (2016) asserts that in Uttarakhand, this provision is generally organise by NGOs. In the following year, 2014-15 experienced a relative decline was observed, where the number of out-of-school CwSN was 1685 and those covered under HBE were 1251 and in the academic session of (2016-17) it further weakened to 1064, with 661 boys and 403 girls (Source: Department of School Education, Uttarakhand 2013-2017). However, the data mentioned above were incomplete, leading to an unclear and unfair picture. Overall, the data reflect a trend in which the number of OoSC is higher, particularly in boys, in the successive years, while the provision of the alternative HBE programme has seen a consistent decline, showing an absence of collaborated endeavours for the provision of out-of-school CwSN and ineffective outcomes of the existing programmes running.

Infrastructure and Accessibility

The provision for inclusive education requires mainstream education to reevaluate the existing infrastructure, methodology, and professional development. Hence, revamping the whole educational setting requires additional and consistent support of resources. Badalo et al. (2022), in their study, underscore the substantial gap in the availability of essential physical and academic resources, which is a genuine challenge as the mainstream education framework is still enduring from the inadequacy of rudimentary facilities.

The government has been vigilant on this issue, as in 2023-24 a sum of Rupees Rs. 1,112.40 lakh has been allocated for aids and appliances of CwSN and Rs. 3,790.89 lakh for teaching-learning. material (TLMs), assistive devices, and equipment for diverse disabilities at the national scale. In this regard, Uttarakhand in the 239th Project Approval Board meeting in 2016 decided to allot Rs. 228.42 lakh to support 7,614 CwSN in Uttarakhand (Table 04), and building on the progress, the 2021 Project Approval Board meeting saw an increased outlay of Rs. 282.97 lakh for the same. This resolution to equip the existing mainstream education is a vital step in bringing inclusivity to academics and society.

Table 4 Approved Financial Outlay for Inclusive Education Interventions for Children with Special Needs (CWSN) in Uttarakhand (2016)

Intervention	Unit Cost	Approved Outlay	
		Phy.	Fin (Rs. in lakh)
Assessment Camp	0.40	46	18.40
Surgeries for eligible CWSN	0.25	41	10.25
Aid & appliances/material/ICT equipment	0.05	1425	71.30
World Disabled Day/Inclusive Sports	0.250	95	23.75
Transport/escort including HBE	0.025	2112	52.80

Parental Training/Counselling at Gubbara Center in Doon Hospital	0.250	95	23.75
Five days residential training of teachers on curricular adaptations	0.002	976	9.76
Additional Cost of Braille Books	0.02283	67	1.53
Additional Cost of Large print Books	0.00973	263	2.56
Hiring of therapy services	0.040	358	14.32
Grand Total			228.42

Source: Government of India, Ministry of Human Resource Development. (2016). 239th Project Approval Board Meeting Minutes, 28th April 2016

After a scrutiny of the infrastructural improvements for CWSNs in the UDISE reports from 2018 to 2022, it was revealed that Uttarakhand has a notable enhancement in the availability of CwSN-friendly toilets as the number constantly improved from 943 in 2018-19 to 1572 by 2021-22 and this arrangement has been initiated by government schools in greater number than any other affiliation. Despite the progress, the functionality is still hampered as in 2021-22, 1407 toilets were functional. (Table 05)

Table 5 Schools with CWSN-Friendly Toilets and Functional CWSN-Friendly Toilets in Uttarakhand (2018-2022)

		Schools With CWSN Friendly Toilet					Schools With Functional CWSN Friendly Toilet				
	Total Schools	Govt.	Govt. aided	Pvt. unaided	Others	Total	Govt.	Govt. aided	Pvt. unaided	Others	Total
2018-19	23559	579	20	327	17	943	538	18	313	14	883
2019-20	23295	616	26	394	17	1053	568	24	373	14	979
2020-21	23169	611	30	520	33	1194	542	28	491	29	1090
2021-22	22815	891	33	613	35	1572	775	32	571	29	1407

Source: Source: Ministry of Education (UDISE Reports from 2018-2022)

Also, UDISE reports mention the progress of ramps and ramps with handrails which disclosed that from 2018-2022 there has been an enhancement in these amenities as the number increased from 12902 (2018-19) to 14072 (2021-22). Correspondingly, the schools with ramps with handrails saw an increase from 7769 to 9210 during the same period (Refer Table 06). However, the disparity between these basic amenities reveals that there is a need for policy interventions to bring widespread improvements in the overall system, supplementing the existing infrastructure with CwSN prerequisites; otherwise, it will be a barrier to the effective implementation of IE (Bhatnagar and Das 2014).

Table 6 Schools having Ramps and Ramps with Handrails in Uttarakhand (2018-2022)

		Number Of Schools Having Ramps for CwSN					Number Of Schools Having Ramps with Handrails for CwSN				
Session	Total Schools	Govt.	Govt. aided	Pvt. unaided	Others	Total	Govt.	Govt. aided	Pvt. unaided	Others	Total
2018-19	23559	11554	156	1108	84	12902	7110	57	564	38	7769

2019-20	23295	11731	169	1196	87	13183	7408	60	606	36	8110
2020-21	23169	11976	176	1255	121	13528	7743	61	632	44	8480
2021-22	22815	12339	203	1395	135	14072	8280	85	794	51	9210

Source: Source: Ministry of Education (UDISE Reports from 2018-2022)

Challenges Identified

IE as an educational model posits variety of challenges and barriers in every region however the struggles augment to a higher degree in remote and rural regions like Uttarakhand. Here are some challenges which the state is facing at present:

Geographical Barriers

The mountainous landscape of the state presents considerable hindrances and hurdles in every facet of life, while it has an augmented effect on PWDs. Uttarakhand's unique geographical topography and socio-economic factors influence the inclusivity of CwSN (Thapli, 2015), and these dynamics play a vital role in building barriers to the quality and efficiency of education, particularly for the disabled. Sharma et al. (2013) asserts in their study that during the monsoon of 2010, around 2300 school buildings including 14,000 km of motor road were destructed leading to disrupted educational infrastructure and development. While disabled-inclusive education should be more comfortable and affluent, looking at the nature of the cohort, these natural challenges create a different sort of challenge, especially when comparing the CwSN inhabitants of urban areas.

Can Uttarakhand's Struggling Education System Meet the Needs of CwSN?

Uttarakhand is a newer state and has a lot of challenges in maintaining a sustainable education environment, such as the provision of quality education in remote and rural mountainous regions, where sometimes it posits on the survival of the inhabitants of that region and teaching and non-teaching staff working there. The above discussion paints a vivid picture of the Uttarakhand educational system in its inception period concerning the subject of IE for CwSN. Some studies conducted in this area are similar to Pushola 's(2015) highlights of poor conditions in the government schools in Dehradun, including improper toilet facilities and mediocre classrooms which led to low enrolments. Similarly, Bhatt (2020) reports that 826 schools lack girls' toilets, 849 lack boys' toilets, 2615 have no playgrounds while 6000 do not have ramps, restricting accessibility in state-owned schools. Bora (2014) and Barthwal (2014) put forth a tensed sketch of educational settings, revealing that over 5,000 government schools are at risk of closure due to low enrolment, with 178 schools already shut down in 2013-14 due to having no students. In addition, Kumar (2014) reflected on the consistently low enrolment rates in the Uttarkashi district, raising serious concerns. The constant decline in the enrolment rates of students is due to the deteriorating quality of public education and parents' inclination towards private education comprising modern facilities, relevant curriculum, diverse co-curricular activities, and a special focus on the progress of each student, making the parents overlook the fact of the over-expensive nature of private education.

Teacher's Perspective and Preparedness

Most research on IE in India primarily focuses on the teacher's perspective and practice (Forber-Pratt & Sarkar, 2021; Kalyanpur, 2022; Taneja et al., 2021). Every education system looks at the potential of its teachers for achieving predefined objectives therefore, the crucial element in the promotion of an inclusive approach teacher's perspective and preparedness become the central point of discourse as they can remove all barriers to education through methodological and organizational choices bringing forth the distinct talents (Chiappetta, 2013). There are some studies undertaken in the state in this regard as Singh (2015) observes the exploitation of self-financed B.Ed. institution and undermining the professional preparation of prospective teachers, as affirmed by Parker and Crisp (2014), who emphasised the need for progressive attitudes and beliefs of

preservice teachers for successful execution of IE. Akhtar (2017) analyses the training modules across DIETs in the state and finds the procedures irrelevant and ineffective and recommends Training Needs Analysis (TNA). Considering the stress and burnout among teachers due to excessive workload, pitiable working conditions, and lack of support, Bhrigu et al. (2021) revealed through their study that the stress level varies between male and female teachers, with higher stress levels reported in the private sector than in government institutions. Singh (2022) notes that the present curriculum remains ineffective in integrating marginalised students, and teachers' perceptions of these groups remain discriminatory. While some crucial studies concerning IE around the nation indicate parallel findings, Kumar (2019) identifies teachers' prejudices against disadvantaged groups, while educators from rural Haryana face dissatisfaction with inadequate resources and large class sizes (Singal et al., 2018). However, Bhatnagar and Das (2014) revealed that the professional preparation of pupil teachers appears to be inefficient for IE practices. The findings collectively emphasise the essential role of pre-service and in-service training in IE methodologies and developing a sensitive understanding of CwSN while having an affirmative outlook regarding IE as a whole concept.

Some Other Challenges

The remote and rural regions of the state, where today's learners in schools may be the first generation to enter formal academics, therefore still subsist orthodox prejudices in socio-cultural settings where CwSNdo not just face discrimination based on their disabilities but rather experience intersectionality. AsTisdall (2013) indicated, PWDs face isolation in their communities with limited social participation, and their voices are not valued within families and communities. It has been a common practice among our cultures to sideline the disabled, resulting in lower academic attainment and employment opportunities (Grills et al., 2016), which ultimately make them an encumbrance for their parents and family. Unsuitable practices to IE have also led to variety of challenges such as parents of PWDs prefer special schooling as mainstream education is not a good fit for CwSN reflecting on their special requirements

and individual attention (Elton-Chalcraft et al., 2016). While a study conducted in Madhya Pradesh by Singal (2012) presents a dismal portrayal of IE as the CwSN confront neglecting attitude and isolation. These challenges are likely to emerge primarily at the inception stage of IE implementation however, the school administration, teachers and even their fellow mates must accept them as their counterparts and the school's environment should be centred on a sense of equality and fraternity.

In summary, the findings indicate that Uttarakhand's efforts toward inclusive education are still in their early stages. Declining enrolment of children with special needs, persistent out-of-school numbers, and limited functionality of available infrastructure reveal significant gaps between policy and practice. While government initiatives and financial allocations reflect an intent to improve, the absence of adequate teacher preparedness and the persistence of socio-cultural barriers continue to hinder progress. These results suggest that inclusive education in the state remains a pressing challenge, requiring more focused and sustained interventions to ensure that every child has access to equitable learning opportunities.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are proposed to strengthen the implementation of Inclusive Education in Uttarakhand by focusing on critical areas such as policymaking, infrastructural accessibility, professional development of teachers, and active community participation. These recommendations aim to bridge the existing gaps between policy formulation and ground-level execution while ensuring that the unique geographical and sociocultural realities of the state are adequately addressed.

Policymaking with Target Intervention

Every recommendation leads to policy making or alterations while there have been consistent policies relating to IE starting from NEP 1986 to NEP 2020 however, Uttarakhand needs to have grass root level planning and provision for IE as it having a unique geographically landscape consisting enormous rural and remote mountainous terrain. Mondal and

Mete (2010) asserted that there have been policy efforts, but they are lacking in operational aspects, and recommended the refurbishment of academic institutions and legal provisions to address these shortcomings. The centrally sponsored Samagra Shiksha programme, launched in 2018, aligns with SDG-4, providing inclusive education without discrimination. However, a national level scheme needs to have modification keeping the local contexts relevant and making it possible it to reaching to the last man standing. NCERT has developed various schemes in alignment with the Samagra Shiksha programme, such as Prashast, Barkhaa Series, ISL resources, and PMeVIDYA, which provide resources such as disability screening tools, reading materials, and multimedia content. These schemes should be utilised to the fullest extent, and the state government should develop and execute essential policies that consider the requirements of different regions and their people.

Accessibility Upgrades

Infrastructural overhaul is a fundamental part of IE, with a prioritised enhancement of all indispensable facilities, such as ramps with handrails, accessible toilets, and all vital aids and equipment, focusing on rural and remote areas. For this, a dedicated funding stream should be established with a strategic phased roll out to make every school disabled-friendly and equipped in a limited timeframe. Substantial funding is essential for developing inclusive environments, addressing discrepancies between urban and rural regions in the state, overcoming barriers, and achieving inclusive education goals (Mitchell, 2012; Lindsay, 2007).

Focused Professional Development

IE should be an integral part of teacher training, especially in all the practical aspects such as internship, community services, etc. In-service teachers should continuously strengthen their professional development by focusing on IE pedagogy and its demands. A notable initiative in this direction is undertaken by the National Council of Teacher Education (NCTE) in 2015 by revising the B.Ed. Curriculum while adding a 16-week internship and coursework on IE (Juyal, 2023). Substantial

studies assert that the integration of IE sensitisation, coupled with practical field experiences, is crucial for IE implementation as it depends on the capabilities and attitude of teachers (Hodkinson, 2006; Leyser et al., 2011).

Fostering Community Participation for IE

Community participation is crucial in nurturing an inclusive environment in every facet of life, particularly in education, utilising partnerships among students, teachers, parents, and the community to promote equality, social justice, and fundamental human rights. Various studies indicate an augmented effect of community engagement in building up an inclusive education system, as Pillay et al. (2015) highlight the positive outcome of actuating collaborative efforts to support disability-inclusive education in all four surveyed countries, while Aceves (2016) emphasises the essential role of community-based organisations in achieving the goals of IE. In building the same thought, Arti et al. (2023) reveal that social commitment initiatives build a robust system enhancing academic practices, enabling a supportive, inclusive learning environment. Hence, strategic planning based on genuine community participation is vital for flourishing IE (O'Brien, 2024).

Future Research Suggestions

Future research on inclusive education in Uttarakhand should move beyond secondary data and incorporate field-based studies to capture the lived realities of Children with Special Needs (CwSN), teachers, and families in rural and remote regions. Longitudinal studies are needed to track the enrolment, retention, and learning outcomes of CwSN over time. Comparative research across different Indian states may help identify effective practices adaptable to Uttarakhand's unique socio-cultural and geographical context. Further exploration of teacher education, community participation, and the role of technology and assistive devices in enhancing inclusivity is also recommended. Additionally, policy implementation studies focusing on the gap between allocation and utilisation of resources can provide actionable insights for bridging disparities in access, infrastructure, and teacher preparedness.

Discussion and Conclusion

It can be concluded that the rural and remote regions of Uttarakhand are still at the initial stage of Inclusive Education implementation, as the state continues to struggle with challenges of accessibility, infrastructural inadequacy, insufficiently trained teachers, and persistent socio-cultural prejudices. While initiatives such as Samagra Shiksha, CwSN-friendly toilets, and ramp facilities indicate gradual progress, their limited reach and weak operationalisation have failed to meet the actual needs of learners with disabilities. The situation is further complicated by Uttarakhand's consistently low inclusion rate and declining enrollment of Children with Special Needs, which reflect the gap between policy intentions and ground realities.

The geographical isolation of many schools, coupled with limited resources and low levels of community awareness, has left academic institutions ill-prepared to address the diverse requirements of students with disabilities. To overcome these barriers, the state must focus on robust and context-specific policy interventions, greater financial commitment, systematic capacity-building of teachers in inclusive pedagogy, and active community participation. Alongside these, the remodelling of existing infrastructure and provision of assistive resources are vital for ensuring that Inclusive Education becomes a lived reality rather than a distant policy vision. Only through such coordinated and sustained efforts can Uttarakhand progress towards an equitable and inclusive educational environment where every child, irrespective of ability, has access to quality learning opportunities.

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