

Indian Journal of Modern Research and Reviews

This Journal is a member of the '*Committee on Publication Ethics*'

Online ISSN:2584-184X



Research Article

Challenges of Inclusive Education in Government Secondary Schools in South Bengal

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.19760619>

Abstract

Inclusive education has become an important educational approach aimed at ensuring equal learning opportunities for all students regardless of their physical, intellectual, social, emotional, or economic conditions. In recent decades, educational policies across the world have emphasised the integration of students with diverse learning needs into mainstream educational institutions. In India, several policy initiatives have been introduced to strengthen inclusive education within the formal school system. This study examines the challenges of implementing inclusive education in government secondary schools located in South Bengal. The research attempts to explore various structural, pedagogical, and socio-economic barriers that affect the successful implementation of inclusive learning practices. The study is based on qualitative and descriptive research methods using secondary data from academic literature, policy documents, and educational reports, along with sample survey-based observations. The findings indicate that several challenges affect inclusive education in government secondary schools. These challenges include a lack of adequate infrastructure, a shortage of trained teachers, overcrowded classrooms, limited availability of assistive learning technologies, and a lack of awareness among parents and communities. The study also highlights the importance of teacher training, school infrastructure development, and community participation in promoting inclusive education. The paper concludes that although government policies support inclusive education, effective implementation requires coordinated efforts from teachers, administrators, policymakers, and local communities. Strengthening inclusive education practices can significantly contribute to educational equality and social development.

Manuscript Information

- ISSN No: 2584-184X
- Received: 06-03-2026
- Accepted: 23-04-2026
- Published: 25-04-2026
- MRR:4(4); 2026: 213-219
- ©2026, All Rights Reserved
- Plagiarism Checked: Yes
- Peer Review Process: Yes

How to Cite this Article

Mondal S. Challenges of Inclusive Education in Government Secondary Schools in South Bengal. Indian J Mod Res Rev. 2026;4(4):213-219.

Access this Article Online



www.mrrjournal.in

KEYWORDS: Inclusive Education, Secondary Education, Educational Equity, Teacher Training, South Bengal.

1. INTRODUCTION

Education plays a fundamental role in shaping human development and social progress. An effective education system ensures that every individual receives equal opportunities to learn and develop their potential. Inclusive education is an approach that aims to provide equal educational opportunities for all learners regardless of their abilities, disabilities, socio-economic background, or cultural differences.

Inclusive education promotes the idea that diversity among learners should be considered a valuable aspect of the learning process rather than a challenge. It encourages schools to create learning environments where all students can participate actively in classroom activities.

In India, inclusive education has received significant attention through educational policies and legislative frameworks. The Right to Education Act and the National Education Policy emphasise the importance of providing inclusive and equitable education for all learners.

Despite these policy initiatives, implementing inclusive education in government secondary schools remains a major challenge. Schools located in rural and semi-urban areas often face limitations related to infrastructure, teacher training, and educational resources.

The present study focuses on government secondary schools in South Bengal and examines the major challenges associated with inclusive education in this region.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Several researchers and educational organisations have studied the concept and challenges of inclusive education. Ainscow (2005) emphasised that inclusive education requires structural changes in the education system, including curriculum reform, teacher training, and community participation. Singal (2006) highlighted that although India has adopted inclusive education policies, their implementation at the school level remains limited due to a lack of resources and trained personnel. Sharma and Deppeler (2005) found that teacher attitudes play a crucial role in the success of inclusive education. Teachers who receive proper training and support are more likely to implement inclusive teaching practices effectively.

UNESCO reports also indicate that inclusive education improves social integration and reduces discrimination among students. However, the success of inclusive education depends on the availability of resources, infrastructure, and trained educators. These studies suggest that inclusive education requires a holistic approach involving policy support, teacher training, and community awareness.

3. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The major objectives of this study are:

1. To understand the concept and significance of inclusive education.
2. To identify the challenges faced in implementing inclusive education in government secondary schools in South Bengal.
3. To analyse the role of teachers in promoting inclusive education.
4. To examine the influence of infrastructure and learning resources on inclusive classrooms.

5. To suggest strategies for improving inclusive education practices.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework provides a structured explanation of the major concepts and variables involved in a research study. It helps the researcher to identify the relationships between different factors that influence the research problem. In studies related to inclusive education, the conceptual framework is important because the implementation of inclusive practices depends on multiple interconnected factors.

In this research, the conceptual framework is designed to analyse how different institutional, pedagogical, and socio-economic variables influence the implementation of inclusive education in government secondary schools in South Bengal. The framework assumes that inclusive education does not depend on a single factor; rather, it is shaped by a combination of educational resources, teacher preparedness, school environment, and social support systems.

The following components form the conceptual framework of this study.

1. School Infrastructure

School infrastructure is one of the fundamental elements that influence inclusive education. For inclusive learning environments to function effectively, schools must provide physical facilities that are accessible to all students.

Important aspects of inclusive infrastructure include:

- Availability of ramps and barrier-free entrances
- Accessible toilets and sanitation facilities
- Proper classroom seating arrangements
- Safe and supportive school environment
- Availability of resource rooms for students with special needs

When schools lack these facilities, students with disabilities often face difficulties in accessing classrooms and participating in learning activities. Therefore, adequate infrastructure is considered an important determinant in the successful implementation of inclusive education.

2. Teacher Training and Professional Competence

Teachers play a central role in implementing inclusive education. Their attitudes, knowledge, and teaching skills determine how effectively diverse learners are supported in the classroom.

Key elements of teacher competence include:

- Understanding of inclusive education principles
- Knowledge of special educational needs
- Ability to use differentiated teaching strategies
- Skills in classroom management for diverse learners
- Participation in professional development programs

Teachers who receive appropriate training are better prepared to address the learning needs of students with disabilities or learning difficulties. Therefore, teacher preparedness is considered one of the most significant variables in the conceptual framework.

3. Availability of Teaching Resources and Assistive Technologies

Inclusive education requires a variety of learning materials and assistive technologies that support students with different abilities. Teaching resources help teachers adapt their instruction according to the needs of diverse learners.

Important resources include:

- Braille books and audio learning materials
- Visual aids and digital learning tools
- Assistive devices for students with hearing or visual impairments
- Inclusive curriculum materials
- Educational software and technology-based learning tools

When such resources are available, students with special educational needs can participate more actively in classroom activities. Lack of teaching resources can therefore create barriers to inclusive learning.

4. Classroom Environment and Class Size

The classroom environment significantly influences the effectiveness of inclusive education. In many government secondary schools, classrooms are often overcrowded, which creates challenges for teachers.

Important aspects of the classroom environment include:

- Student-teacher ratio
- Classroom interaction and participation
- Availability of individual attention for students
- Positive and supportive classroom atmosphere
- Flexible teaching strategies

Large class sizes make it difficult for teachers to address the individual needs of students. A supportive classroom environment is therefore essential for the success of inclusive education.

5. Socio-Economic Background of Students

The socio-economic conditions of students and their families also influence their participation in inclusive education. Students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds may face additional challenges in accessing educational resources.

Factors related to socio-economic background include:

- Family income and economic stability
- Access to healthcare and rehabilitation services
- Availability of learning materials at home
- Parental education level
- Social support systems for students with disabilities

Socio-economic barriers can affect attendance, learning opportunities, and overall academic performance.

6. Community Awareness and Parental Support

Community attitudes and parental involvement play an important role in promoting inclusive education. Positive attitudes toward diversity encourage acceptance and participation of students with special needs in mainstream schools.

Important aspects include:

- Awareness about inclusive education among parents
- Community acceptance of students with disabilities

- Parent-teacher collaboration
- Participation of local organisations and stakeholders
- Social support networks for inclusive education

When communities and families actively support inclusive education, schools can create more effective and inclusive learning environments.

7. Implementation of Inclusive Education (Outcome Variable)

The final component of the conceptual framework is the implementation of inclusive education in government secondary schools in South Bengal. This represents the outcome that is influenced by the various factors discussed above.

Successful implementation of inclusive education can be observed through:

- Equal participation of students in classroom activities
- Reduced educational barriers for students with disabilities
- Improved academic engagement among diverse learners
- Positive school environment promoting diversity and inclusion
- Greater social interaction among students

The conceptual framework, therefore, assumes that inclusive education is the result of the interaction between infrastructure, teacher preparedness, educational resources, classroom environment, socio-economic conditions, and community support.

Summary of the Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of this study highlights that the implementation of inclusive education in government secondary schools in South Bengal is influenced by multiple interconnected factors. Institutional factors such as infrastructure and educational resources, pedagogical factors such as teacher training and classroom environment, and social factors such as socio-economic conditions and community awareness collectively shape the effectiveness of inclusive education.

By examining the relationships among these variables, the study seeks to identify the major challenges that hinder inclusive education and to propose strategies for improving inclusive educational practices.

4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The present study is based on a descriptive and qualitative research design. Conceptual analysis, primary and secondary data sources were used for the study.

Sources of Data:

Data were collected from:

- Educational books and academic journals
- Government reports and policy documents
- Research articles related to inclusive education
- Educational statistics and survey reports
- Sample analysis from selected government secondary Schools in South Bengal.

Sample Framework (Illustrative):

A sample analysis was conducted based on observations from selected government secondary schools in South Bengal.

Sample respondents included:

Category	Number of Respondents
Teachers	60
Students	120
Total	180

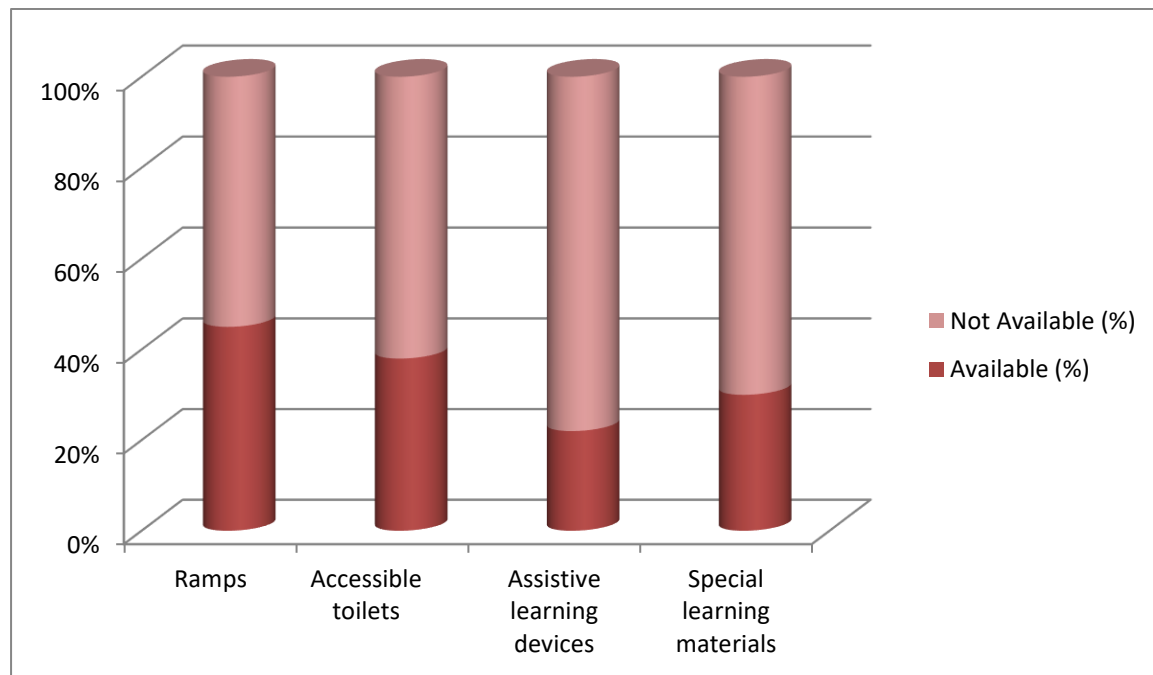
DATA Analysis Method:

The collected information was analysed using descriptive analytical methods to identify the key challenges of inclusive education

5. DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS**A. Infrastructure Availability:**

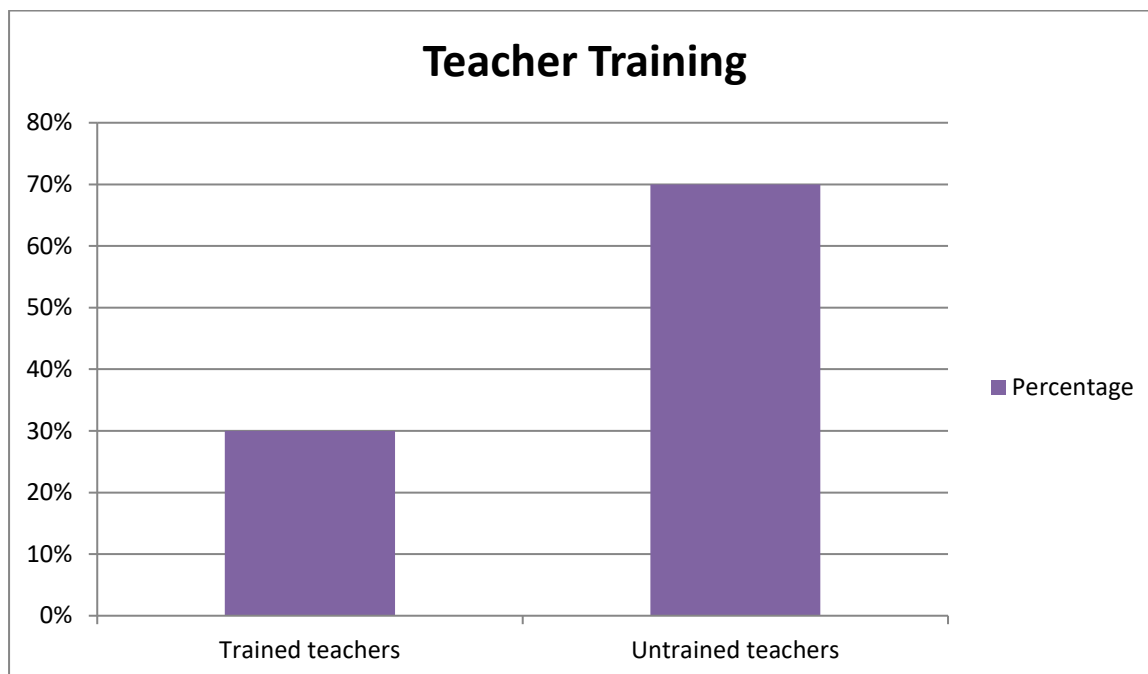
Facility	Available (%)	Not Available (%)
Ramps	45	55
Accessible toilets	38	62
Assistive learning devices	22	78
Special learning materials	30	70

The data show that many government secondary schools still lack the basic infrastructure required for inclusive education.

Infrastructure Availability**B. Teacher Training:**

Training Status	Percentage
Trained teachers	30%
Untrained teachers	70%

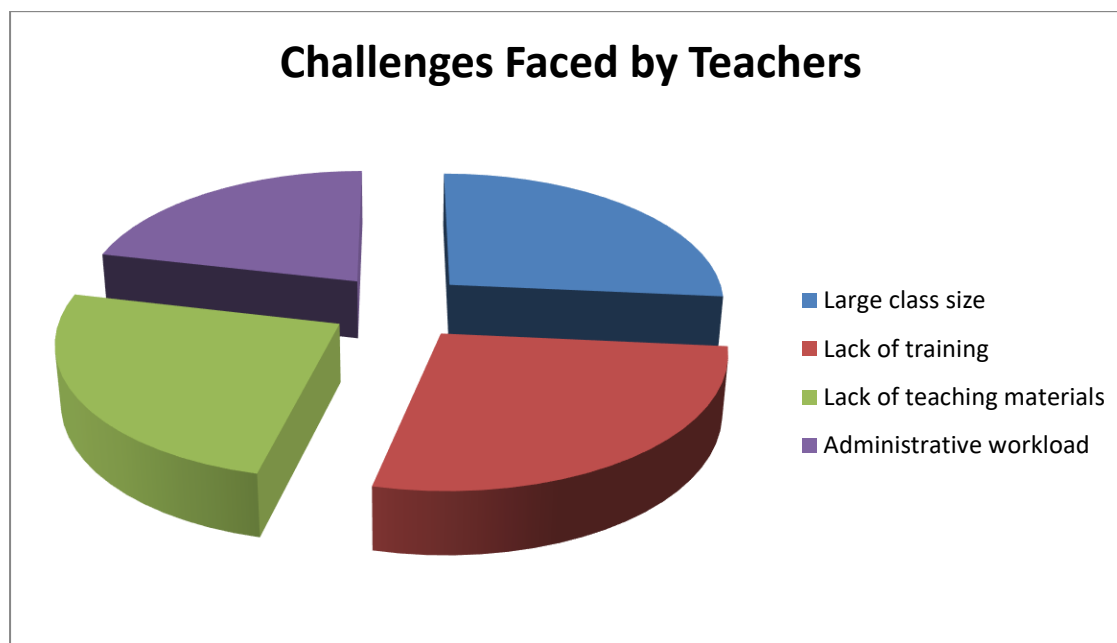
The majority of teachers reported that they had not received formal training in inclusive teaching methods.



C. Challenges Faced by Teachers:

Challenges	Percentage
Large class size	68%
Lack of training	70%
Lack of teaching materials	64%
Administrative workload	55%

These findings indicate that teacher training and classroom size are major barriers to effective inclusive education.



6. DISCUSSION

The analysis reveals that inclusive education in government secondary schools in South Bengal is influenced by multiple structural and institutional challenges. One of the most significant issues is the lack of adequate infrastructure. Many

Schools were originally designed without considering accessibility requirements. Another important issue is the shortage of trained teachers. Teachers often feel unprepared to address the diverse learning needs of students with disabilities.

The availability of teaching materials and assistive learning technologies also plays an important role in creating inclusive learning environments. The findings of the study suggest that improving teacher training and infrastructure development can significantly enhance inclusive education practices.

Challenges:

Challenges of Inclusive Education in Government Secondary Schools in South Bengal:

1. Lack of Infrastructure

One of the most significant challenges is the lack of accessible infrastructure in schools. Many government schools do not have ramps, accessible toilets, or classroom arrangements suitable for students with disabilities.

Students with physical disabilities often face difficulties in moving around the school campus, which affects their participation in educational activities.

2. Shortage of Trained Teachers

T. Teacher training is another major challenge. Many teachers have limited knowledge about inclusive teaching strategies and special education methods.

Without proper training, teachers may find it difficult to address the diverse learning needs of students in inclusive classrooms.

3. Overcrowded Classrooms

Government secondary schools often have large class sizes with more than fifty students in a single classroom. This makes it difficult for teachers to provide individual attention to students who require additional support.

4. Lack of Teaching Resources

Inclusive education requires specialised teaching materials and assistive technologies such as audio books, screen readers, and visual learning aids. Unfortunately, many government schools lack these resources.

5. Socio-economic Barriers

Many students in South Bengal come from economically disadvantaged families. Financial difficulties often affect their ability to continue their education, especially for students with disabilities who require additional support.

6. Lack of Awareness

Lack of awareness among parents and communities also creates barriers to inclusive education. Some parents may not fully understand the importance of inclusive learning environments.

Role of Teachers in Inclusive Education

Teachers play a central role in the successful implementation of inclusive education. Their attitudes, teaching methods, and classroom management skills greatly influence the learning experiences of students.

Teachers should adopt flexible teaching strategies that accommodate diverse learning styles. Techniques such as group activities, visual aids, and interactive learning can help students participate actively in classroom discussions.

Professional development programs and training workshops can help teachers improve their understanding of inclusive education and develop effective teaching methods.

Positive teacher attitudes towards diversity can create a supportive classroom environment where every student feels valued and respected.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. Improvement of school infrastructure, including ramps and accessible facilities.
2. Implementation of regular teacher training programs on inclusive education.
3. Reduction of class size by appointing additional teachers.
4. Provision of assistive learning technologies.
5. Promotion of community awareness regarding inclusive education.
6. Strengthening monitoring mechanisms for inclusive education policies.

7. CONCLUSION

Inclusive education is essential for building an equitable and inclusive society. It ensures that every learner has equal opportunities to participate in the educational process.

The study highlights that although educational policies support inclusive education, practical challenges continue to affect its implementation in government secondary schools in South Bengal.

Addressing these challenges requires coordinated efforts from policymakers, teachers, administrators, and communities. Strengthening inclusive education practices can contribute significantly to educational equality and social development.

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