

ENROLLMENT AND DISTRIBUTION OF DISABLED AT PRIMARY SCHOOLS IN NEPAL

Shiba Prasad Rijal, PhD

Associate Professor
Department of Geography Education,
Tribhuvan University, Kirtipur
rijalshibaprasad@hotmail.com

Abstract

The issue of education for disabled children is of major concern with a view to achieve the goal of universal primary education. Nepal, being a signatory of Education for All and the Salamanca Declaration (1994), has adopted a policy of inclusive education ensuring the presence, participation and achievement of children having different abilities in the schools. Altogether 53,681 children (1.3 percent of the total enrolment) having different abilities were enrolled at primary schools of Nepal in 2009. Of them the proportion of children with physical and mental disabilities was high as compared to other types. The enrolment of disabled children varies spatially by region and district. Among disabled enrolled at primary school, The Western and Mid-western Mountain Region share the highest proportion i.e. 3.7 percent each. Among district, Surkhet shows the highest proportion (4.3 percent) of disabled children enrolled. Socio-economic condition of the household and disability of children are directly or indirectly interlinked. The positive correlation between district level Human Poverty Index (HPI) and enrolment of children having disability clearly show this. However, the role of other factors cannot be undermined.

Key words: Capabilities, disability, enrolment, impairment, inclusive education, rights-based approach.

Introduction

The issue of education for disabled children is of major concern with a view to achieve the goal of universal primary education—'Education for All'. UNICEF's Medium-Term Strategic Plan for 2002–05, states that 'all children have access to and complete an education of good quality' and emphasized the well-being of all children applying a rights-based approach prioritizing the needs of the most disadvantaged children. These include all categories of disadvantage children including those with disabilities (UNICEF, 2003). The government of Nepal has ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1990 (CBM and Handicap International, 2006). Nepal is a signatory of Education for All and the Salamanca Declaration (1994), and adopted a policy of increasing participation rate in education of children with disabilities by adopting the policy of inclusive education (UNICEF, 2003).

Inclusive education is a process of increasing participation of all students in schools, including those with disabilities. It is about restructuring education cultures, policies and practices so that they can respond to a diverse range of learners—male and female; disabled and non-disabled; from different ethnic, language, religious or financial backgrounds; of different ages; and facing different health, migration, refugee or other vulnerability challenges (Save the Children, 2002; Lewis, 2007). The focus of inclusive education was strengthened during the 1990s. The education of disabled

children was seen as a priority by the Education for All Conference, Jomtien, in 1990. It ensures the presence, participation and achievement of all students in schooling. Inclusion is about the child's right to participate and the school's duty to accept the child (UNICEF, 2003). This rejects the use of special schools or classrooms to separate students with disabilities from students without disabilities and also ensures the full participation of students with disabilities and upon respect for their social, civil, and educational rights.

There is a growing consensus among stakeholders related to disabled that inclusion in mainstream schooling is the appropriate way to provide education for all children by developing support services to the disabled child rather than moving the child to the support services and forcing to change (UNICEF, 2003). Nepal's first attempt towards inclusion dates back to the early 1960s, with the inclusion of some students with visual impairment in the regular classroom at a school in Jawalakhel, Lalitpur (UNICEF, 2003). After that the government has been promoting inclusive education with several initiatives to provide integrated and inclusive education for children with disabilities. The Constitution of Nepal (1990) has guaranteed the education, health, and welfare of people with disabilities. Likewise, the Child Act 1992 recognizes the rights of the child to survival, protection and development. It provides legal protection to all children, including children with disabilities. The Basic and Primary Education Plan (1991–2001) initiated the National Special Education Programme in 1992.

The programme integrates disabled children into mainstream schools. Likewise, the Ninth Five-Year Plan (1997–2002) included disability and rehabilitation issues in programmes of the Ministries of Health, Education, Child Development and Social Welfare. The Local Self Government Act 1999 has also created provisions for maintaining of people with disabilities, and ensures their protection and livelihoods according to national policy. The Tenth Five-Year Plan (2002–07) aims to provide equal rights and a barrier-free environment; empower and involve people with disabilities in sports activities; provide prevention and rehabilitation centers; and gives educational opportunities from primary to post-graduation level (UNICEF, 2003). EFA 2004–2009 states that each child between the age group of 6–10 has access to and completion of free and compulsory quality basic and primary education irrespective of gender, ethnicity, religion, disability, and geographic location.

Children with disabilities face multiple barriers resulting in exclusion from basic services such as education, skill training and employment, which reinforce marginalization, and create conditions for impoverishment (CBM and Handicap International, 2006). Though there are many constraints, enrolment of children with disabilities in mainstream schools has been increasing in Nepal with many governmental and non-governmental initiatives and encouragements. In this context, this paper attempts to analyze the status of enrollment and distribution of children with disabilities in primary schools of Nepal. The first section of the paper highlights on introduction including study methods and materials. The second section deals with scenario of distribution of students with disabilities along with association between poverty and disability and the final section provides concluding remarks.

Materials and Methods

The study is based on secondary data acquired from Flash Report published by the Department of Education in 2009. Both statistical and non-statistical techniques are applied for data analysis. Mean and standard deviation (SD) of the percentage of disabled students to the total enrolment are used as parameters to identify the spatial patterns of distribution of disabled students at primary level. In this study, the mean value is considered as the average national value (i.e. 1.3 percent of the total enrolment). The standard deviation of proportion of disabled student is calculated from district level primary school data. Considering mean and standard deviation, the categories of districts are established by adding or subtracting standard deviation to and from the mean value. On this basis, three categories of districts are recognized. These are districts having low proportion of disabled

students (less than Mean - 1 SD), medium (Mean + 1 SD and Mean - 1 SD) and high (above than Mean + 1 SD). The distribution of districts according to class order or category displays the spatial pattern of distribution of disabled students at primary level. Map showing distribution of students with disabilities is prepared using geographical information system (GIS) program. In addition, an association between disability and human poverty index by district is identified and tested statistically.

Enrolment of Disabled at Primary Schools

The voices on rights-based and inclusive education have become stronger (ASPBAE & OSI, 2010) in both developing as well as developed countries. Nepal is not an exception. The School Sector Reform Plan (SSRP) envisages that all marginalized groups including girls, Dalits, ethnic minorities and differently-able populations should have equitable access to quality, basic and primary education (Government of Nepal, 2009). The government of Nepal has made various efforts over the years for inclusive education. As a result, children having different abilities are enrolled at schools of Nepal. Altogether 4,900,663 students enrolled at primary level in 2009. Of them, 53,681 (1.3 percent of the total enrolment) were having disabilities of different categories (Table 1).

Table 1: Enrollment by type of disability

Disability types	Number	Percent
Physical	18339	34.2
Mental	16004	29.8
Deaf	8343	15.5
Vocal/speech related	4695	8.8
Blind	4262	7.9
Deaf and blind	2038	3.8
Total	53681	100

Source: Department of Education, 2009.

Among students having disabilities, proportion of students with physical disability was high (44.2 percent) followed by mental disability (29.8 percent), deaf (15.5 percent), vocal/speech related (8.8 percent) and blind (7.9 percent). The proportion of deaf and blind was 3.8 percent in the primary schools.

Distribution of Disabled Students

The enrollment of children having disabilities varies by development region and ecological belts. Among development regions, Mid-western development region shows the highest proportion of disabled students (25.3 percent) as compared to others (Table 2 and Figure 1). Likewise, among geographical regions, the hill constitutes the highest proportion (46 percent) of enrollment of the children with disabilities. Likewise, the Western hill exhibits the highest proportion (11.1 percent) of students having disabilities among ecological regions.

Table 2: Distribution of disabled students by ecological region

Region	Mountain		Hill		Tarai		Total	
	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%
Eastern	962	1.8	3658	6.8	4378	8.2	8998	16.8
Central	1469	2.7	5233	8.6	5334	9.9	12036	22.4
Western	91	0.2	5981	11.1	2047	3.8	8119	15.1
Mid-western	3492	6.5	5890	11.0	4225	7.9	13607	25.3
Far-western	3454	6.4	4571	8.5	2896	5.4	10921	20.3
Total	9468	17.6	25333	46.0	18880	35.2	53681	100.0

Source: Department of Education, 2009.

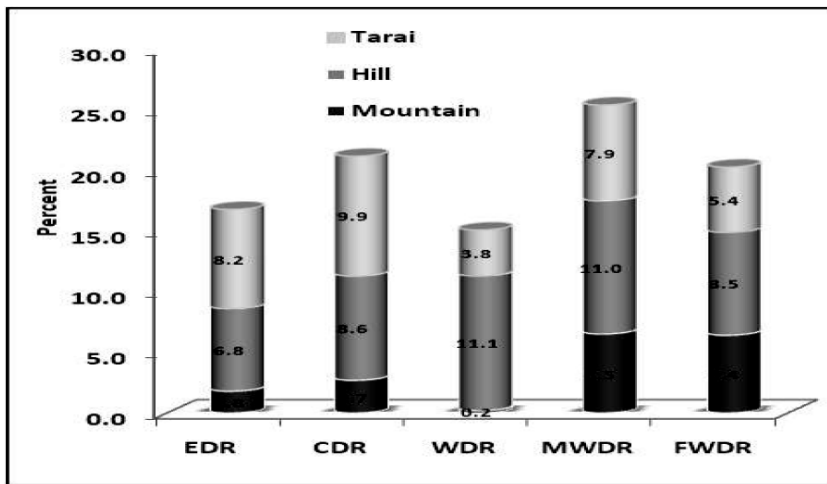


Figure 1: Distribution of disabled students by region.

The enrolment of disabled children as percent of total enrolment is given in table 3. The proportion of disabled student in relation to total enrollment is high in Far-western development region (2.07 percent) as compared to the other regions. The Central development region has the lowest proportion of disabled students (0.76 percent) at primary level. Among ecological belts, the Western and Mid-western Mountain regions show the highest proportion of disabled students i.e. 3.7 percent each. The Western Tarai shows the lowest proportion (0.6 percent) among 15 ecological regions.

Table 3: Disabled as percent of total enrolment by region

Region	Mountain	Hill	Tarai	Total
Eastern	0.8	1.0	0.7	0.85
Central	1.5	1.0	0.7	0.76
Western	3.7	1.1	0.6	0.87
Mid-western	3.7	1.4	1.5	1.69
Far-western	2.8	2.4	1.4	2.07
Total	2.09	0.86	0.96	1.30

Source: Department of Education, 2009

As indicated above, considering mean (1.3) and standard deviation (0.8) of the proportion of disabled students, the districts are classified into three groups i.e. low medium and high categories (Table 4 and Figure 2).

Table 4: Categories of districts by students with disabilities

Categories	Districts
Low	Solukhumbu, Saptari, Bhaktapur, Lalitpur, Kathmandu, Rupandehi and Dailekh (7)
Medium	Sarlahi, Rolpa, Salyan, Parsa, Dhanusa, Manang, Taplejung, Okhaldhunga, Khotang, Morang, Sunsari, Siraha, Dolakha, Sindhupalchok, Sindhuli, Dhading, Mahottari, Myagdi, Parbat, Baglung, Nawalparasi, Jajrkot, Rautahat, Panchthar, Dhankuta, Udaypur, Jhapa, Ramechhap, Kavre, Nuwakot, Makwanpur, Bara, Lamjung, Tanahu, Gulmi, Palpa, Agarkhachi, Kapilbastu, Pyuthan, Dang, Banke, Bardiya, Doti, Kailali, Kanchanpir, Sankhuwasabha, Illam, Terhathum, Bhojpur, Chitwan, Gorkha, Syanja, Sankhuwasabha, Kaski, and Baitadi (55)
High	Rasuwa, Mustang, Mugu, Kalikot, Humla, Jumla, Dolpa, Surkhet, Bajura, Bajhang, Achham, Darchula and Dadeldhura (13)

Source: Department of Education, 2009

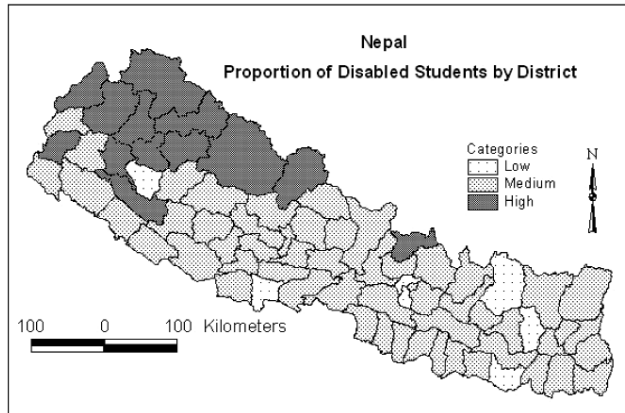


Figure 2

There are altogether 13 districts having high proportion of students with disabilities. Among them Surkhet has the highest proportion (4.3 percent) of enrollment of disabled children. The table 4 also clearly shows that out of 13 districts that belong to high proportion of students having disability, three namely Surkhet, Achham and Dadeldhura are hill districts. No Tarai districts belong to this category i.e. high proportion of students with disabilities. Fifty-five districts belong to medium category and seven districts to low category. Among mountain districts, Solukhumbu is only one mountain district that belongs to category having low proportion of enrolment of disabled students. Likewise, two Tarai districts- Saptari and Rupandehi belong to category having low proportion of enrollment of disabled students.

Disability and Socio-economic Condition

Disability and poverty are closely interlinked as poor children are less likely to receive early intervention and support, and more likely to suffer lasting impairments. The reverse is also true: families struggling with disability are more likely to be trapped in poverty due to a range of challenges. Poverty exacerbates and deepens the extent of their

disability and social exclusion. In this way, disability may be both a cause and a consequence of a family's poverty (Save the Children, 2002). False belief prevalent in society is equally an obstacle as poverty in the education of people with disabilities. These are further aggravated by the inaccessible location of school, inconvenient physical infrastructure, and the lack of effective and required education resources.

As in other areas, enrolment of disabled children at primary schools in Nepal is directly or indirectly linked to the socio-economic condition of the household. To identify the extent of association between disability and poverty, the district wise proportion of students having disability in primary schools and human poverty index (HPI) is analyzed. The regional summary of HPI and disability proportion is shown in table 5. HPI is high (46.3 percent) in the Mid-western development region as compared to the others. The Far-western and Central development regions rank second and third respectively. The eastern and western development regions show relatively better economic condition. Regarding students enrollment, the western and mid-western mountain regions exhibit high proportion of disability among children enrolled at primary schools.

Table 5: Human Poverty Index and proportion of disabled students by region

Region	HPI*	Proportion of disabled student**
Eastern DR	37.1	0.85
Mountain	42.0	0.8
Hill	39.7	1.0
Tarai	35.8	0.7
Central DR	39.7	0.76
Mountain	48.9	1.5
Hill	34.0	1.0
Tarai	44.5	0.7
Western DR	36.7	0.87
Mountain	40.0	3.7
Hill	35.7	1.1
Tarai	37.7	0.6
Midwestern DR	46.3	1.69
Mountain	59.3	3.7
Hill	50.0	1.4
Tarai	38.9	1.5
Far-western DR	45.9	2.07
Mountain	54.0	2.8
Hill	52.2	2.4
Tarai	37.6	1.4
Nepal	39.6	1.3

Source: * UNDP, 2004; ** Department of Education, 2009

The correlation between district level Human Poverty Index (HPI) and district level proportion of disabled children is computed applying Pearson's correlation coefficient technique. This shows positive correlation (0.11) between HPI and disabled enrollment. This indicates that the higher the poverty level higher is the disability of the children. However, the enrollment of disabled children in the school is directly or indirectly affected by many factors like awareness level of parents, teachers' attitude, socio-cultural environment, distance and the environment of the school.

Conclusion

Nepal has adopted a policy of inclusive education ensuring the presence, participation and achievement of children having different abilities in the schools. However, many disabled are still out of school and those enrolled in the school have been facing diverse challenges in getting a basic education due to various reasons. These include physically inaccessible schools, inadequate trained teachers, unawareness of the parents, lack of disabled friendly

school environment and others. Many children with disabilities are not provided the support they need to attend community schools and many schools are unprepared to teach children with disabilities. Even, some children with disabilities are unjustly denied admission to schools.

The distribution of disabled children in the primary schools varies by regions and districts. One of the reasons for this variation is due to variation in economic condition. Household's economic condition and disability of the children is directly interlinked. The positive correlation between district level Human Poverty Index (HPI) and enrolment of children having disability clearly shows this. The enrolment of children with disabilities and improving the quality of their life can be enhanced by increasing awareness, enhancing teachers' capabilities to handle children with disabilities, increasing accessibility and infrastructure of the educational establishments and providing adequate teaching and learning materials.

References

- ASPBAE & OSI. (2010). *Exploring partnerships for education for all: A study on the sector-wide approach (SWAP) in Nepal*
- Christoffel-Blindenmission Christian Blind Mission (CBM) and Handicap International. (2006). *Disability in development: Experiences in inclusive practices*. New Delhi: CBM and Handicap International.
- Department of Education (DOE). (2009). *Flash 1 Report 2066 (2009-10)*. Kathmandu: DOE.
- Government of Nepal (2009). *School sector reform plan 2009-2015*. Kathmandu: Ministry of Education.
- Lewis, I. (2007). *Report to NORAD on desk review on inclusive education policies and plans in Nepal, Tanzania, Vietnam and Zambia*.
- Save the Children (2002). *Schools for all: Including disabled children in education*. London: Development Dialogue Team.
- United Nations. (2008). *The Millennium Development Goals report 2008*. New York: United Nations.
- UNDP. (2004). *Nepal human development report 2004: Empowerment and poverty reduction*. Kathmandu: UNDP.
- UNICEF. (2003). *Examples of inclusive education in Nepal*. Kathmandu: UNICEF