Exploring Challenges of Inclusive Education in Nepal: From Policy and Practice Landscape

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Abstract

In Nepal, both integrated and special schools provide education to children with disabilities, supported by the government, donor agencies, or private funding. Inclusive education efforts and initiatives started as per the government's ratification of a universal declaration. However, including children with disability in the general class seems challenging. Regarding these issues, this study aims to explore the challenges that children with disability face in general classes with the existing support and ways out the coping strategies for smooth assimilation. Interpretative phenomenological research designs have been employed to explore the insights and perspectives of students on assimilation in general classes. The four students with disability from integrated schools representing children with visual impairment and children with deaf were purposively selected and interviewed through semi-structured interview guidelines in a natural setting. The study explored significant challenges such as the lack of disabled-friendly physical facilities, the domination of traditional methods, the presence of an untrained teacher, the lack of an expanded core curriculum, the lack of peer support, and poor psychological attachment. The exploration of challenges assists policymakers and educators in setting up strategies for effective inclusion in school education and the community. The extreme mitigation of challenges promotes an inclusive atmosphere in regular classrooms.

Keywords: Inclusive education efforts, challenges in mainstreaming, coping strategies, post-structuralism, discourse analysis

Introduction

Including children with disability in mainstream settings is one of the buzzing issues in the context of classrooms in Nepal. After ratifying the universal declaration on inclusion education, the Nepal government has initiated various programs in different extents of times of time (Puri et al., 2024). Most of the education forums in the world have prioritized strengthening the practices of inclusive education.

However, the implementation practice is not as expected. Without proper infrastructure development and effective academic practice, students with diverse needs become victims of exclusion from normalization (Maudslay, 2014).

Inclusive education goes beyond the traditional segregated classrooms or special education programs model (Beutel et al., 2019). The diverse and adaptive learning environment is where students of all abilities learn side by side, respecting and celebrating each other's differences (Thapaliya, 2023). The core principle behind inclusive education is acknowledging that each student has unique strengths and needs and strives to provide equitable access to education for everyone (Baraily, 2024a). Throughout this journey, we will delve into these challenges and understand how they affect the implementation of inclusive education in the general classroom. From differing learning styles and abilities to ensuring adequate resources and support, we will explore the complexities that educators, administrators, and students might encounter as they embrace the inclusive education model (Baraily, 2021b).

Another primary challenge is creating an environment where all students can effectively learn and grow. This involves catering to learning paces, preferences, and needs, which can sometimes be curricula. It is a task that requires innovative teaching strategies and a deep understanding of individual students' profiles. Additionally, ensuring that each student receives the appropriate support can be a logistical and resource-intensive challenge. Teachers and schools must collaborate closely with specialist therapists and other professionals to provide tailored assistance for students with disabilities or unique learning needs. This collaboration requires strong communication and teamwork.

Social dynamics also play a significant role in inclusive classrooms. Fostering a culture of empathy, respect, and acceptance among students can be challenging, especially when societal biases or misconceptions about disabilities exist. Educators must actively cultivate an environment where all students feel valued and are encouraged to interact and collaborate.

We will identify these obstacles and seek innovative solutions throughout this exploration of inclusive education challenges. We will consider the role of technology, teacher training, parents' involvement, and the power of awareness in addressing these challenges. This study intends to explore students' challenges while including the classroom and gain insight into the complexities and potential solutions surrounding inclusive education in the general classroom.

Methodology

This study employed a qualitative research design with interpretative phenomenology focusing on integrated schools to explore experiences about the significant challenges of inclusive education (Creswell, 2021). This design is appropriate for exploring challenges that students with disabilities face in their learning expeditions. Two integrated schools in Madhes province were purposively selected, with six students with disabilities. The participants were reading at a secondary level from eighth to tenth grade. In-depth interviews were taken from participants chosen via semi-structured interview guidelines focusing on experience with inclusive education regarding challenges and coping strategies. The interviews were

transcribed and preceded by thematic qualitative data analysis. At first, the data were read thoroughly, and codes were generated to get the basic theme. The codes were reorganized to create a global theme, which was discussed in the study's findings.

Result and Discussion

The result obtained from the information provided by the profound interview with the participant is associated with the result of the study. This result is intercourse with post-structuralism and discourse analysis. The significant themes leading to this study's conclusion are discussed below.

Lack of Disable Friendly Physical Facilities

The tangible facility provided by the school for children with disability embraces the mitigating factor for the barrier to education. If the infrastructure is disability-friendly, it is considered to fulfill one aspect of inclusion (Ivancevich & Gilbert, 2000). In this context, one of the participants, S1, said,

> *I cannot see entirely, and it always feels challenging to go to school. The school has no disabled-friendly environment; sometimes, I have fallen down the drain and have difficulty sitting in the classroom. Sometimes, furniture may break, and I dropped it due to a lack of knowledge about the situation.*

In this assertion, the existing physical environment is not disabled-friendly and faces several transportation-related problems. Due to the lack of visual impairment-friendly roads, pathways, and classrooms, the children may fall into an accident (Kumar et al., n.d.). The furniture is not also visually impairment friendly. As a result, the student may lose by damage. In such a scenario, inclusion cannot be ensured without providing suitable physical infrastructure (Vakil et al., 2009). Inclusive schools need to begin setting up disabled-friendly environments within the school (Scruggs & Mastropieri, 1996). The school needs to build every aspect of the school, such as furniture, classrooms, and other facilities, according to the nature of the disability (Sherpa & Baraily, 2021). Another participant, S2, said as

> *I go to school by wheelchair. There is no suitable place to move everywhere in the school. So I have not seen a different section in my school. I have to sit near the door because there is no good place to move around. I cannot participate in every activity in the classroom due to my physical condition. My non-disabled peers actively participate in classroom activities, but I cannot.*

In the above statement, the academic environment created by the school is not disabled-friendly. The classroom management does not support students with physical disabilities and low vision (Zaunda et al., 2018). Due to the insufficient place to move the wheelchair, he has to sit near the door. This situation is a toolkit for the learner. In such cases, the student cannot interact with friends because of his seating condition. The school management needs to consider a comprehensive classroom so that students with physical disabilities can roam everywhere during instruction for suitable interaction (Preeti & Kiran, 2012).Another participant S3 said,

> *I have a shared vision problem, and I cannot see the writing on the whiteboard. The setting of the board is more traditional, and I need to listen to the teacher's sounds but not his demonstration. I could get support from a resource teacher. The classroom management is not supporting me.*

From this assertion, it is clear that the participant has low vision and cannot see the teacher's demonstration. So, teachers must manage large printed materials and assistive devices for students with low ideas (Mukhopadhyay et al., 2012). If the students cannot see the board correctly, the teacher must address the intelligent board in large font.

Domination of Traditional Teaching Method

The principle of instructional method guides our existing teaching pedagogy, which is under the domination of traditional thought in Teaching. The lecture method is frequently used in the present teaching approach (Ruhl & Suritsky, 1995). This method is adopted regardless of the diversity management strategy. In this context, student S1 said,

> *I cannot understand the content of science and mathematics. The regular teacher demonstrates the teaching module on the whiteboard, but I cannot see it. Until now, I have not experienced the Teaching of a regular teacher in Braille script. I try to write in Braille on my stylus but feel confused. I cannot understand geometry and algebra in mathematics because Braille script has no symbolic mechanism.*

In the above version of the participant, the teacher's instruction is still guided by the conventional method and fails to introduce modern methods in Teaching. Most regular teachers do not have Braille knowledge, so their education is dominated by the lecture method (Kendall, 2018). The students with visual impairment write and note down the teacher's instruction on the slate with Braille script, but the teacher cannot correct it if something is missing in the student's write-up. So schools need to manage teachers who know Braille (Mukhopadhyay et al., 2012). Otherwise, the knowledge level of students with visual impairment cannot be improved. With the teacher's direct instruction, the students with visual impairment have still been marginalized. In this context, another student, S2, asserted,

> *In the regular classroom, most teaching methods fall under the traditional instructional approaches. The teachers taught higher content, but I could not understand what he taught. The regular teacher teaches us computers as theoretical subjects. There is no computer that is disabled-friendly for practical use in school.*

In the above assertion, the existing pedagogy adopted by the teacher in a regular class is wholly oriented to the direct instruction method, and ways of presenting the content are based upon the teacher-centered process (Wilson & Sindelar, 1991). The teacher's presentation dominates the student's activities. In such cases, students' activeness and engagement fall under the miracle of shadow. The teacher needs to adopt a student engagement method for effective adjustment in a regular class (Al-Makahleh, 2011). Children with

visual impairment must be educated in tactile and Braille manners. In the above context, student S3 quoted as,

> *In the unit test, I am excluded because there is only a provision for the writer in the final examination. In such cases, I cannot get the opportunity to improve my reading, along with frequent feedback from the respective teacher.*

In this quotation, students are excluded from the opportunity to improve their potential because they read with hard effort in the classroom. Still, they are unable to take their qualifying test in Braille because the national examination board of Nepal has not managed test papers in Braille even though the explicit provision is included in the constitution of Nepal. Due to the lack of policy implementation, students with visual impairment are still behind in grabbing such opportunities (Hong et al., 2017). If the willingness comes from the government sector, the provision of test administration in Braille is a difficult task; the attention of the national examination board should come to that side because there is no necessary human resource in the market (Bickford & Falco, 2012).

Presence of an Untrained Teacher

The presence of unskilled teachers for teaching inclusive education in the regular class precludes the opportunity for active participation. The teacher prepares and attends the course through the lens of traditional students and is unaware of differently able children (Wall, 2002). In this context, participant S3 said,

> *I read in class nine and always faced the problem of listening. I see everything on the board. Whatever the teacher demonstrates, I see only the figure and diagram, but I cannot understand what the picture illustrates. The teacher could present the subject matter. I would be able to grasp content and its illustration.*

In the present school scenario, the teacher recruited in the regular school is untrained and beyond the skill of Inclusive Teaching. The teacher is guided by the traditional teaching method, and they do not know how to teach in diversified classrooms, including students with hearing problems (Hattie et al., 1996). From this fact, it is clear that the state needs to recruit inclusive teachers in every community school to make teaching more effective (Wall, 2002). The government can also organize special education training periodically with necessary skills such as Braille and sign language. In the same context as above, participant S4 asserted,

> *When I read in the resource class, I can understand hard with the help of sign language. The interaction is made easily in the resource class, but when I go to the integrated classroom, I am deprived of the opportunity. The non-disabled peers underestimate us, saying Vahiro. We could understand if the regular teacher managed the sign language interpretation.*

In this above assertion, the students are still victims of labeling by conventional thought. Average students come from different backgrounds and have different mindsets due to the lack of a model of disability

awareness; they exhibit dogmatic ideology and discriminatory thoughts (Susanti & Rudiyati, 2019). As above narratives, participant S2 said,

> *I am facing the same challenges in the regular classroom. As per the teacher's speech, I cannot express all matters in Braille in a regular class. The non-disabled peer also does not know how to support us. The integrated classroom seemed to be just an integration of disabled and non-disabled students without the necessary support.*

From the above statement, it is clear that there are varieties of challenges that obstruct smooth adaptation. These challenges are constraints for psychosocial adjustment in the regular class (Rieser, 2010). The traditional means of instruction cannot address the demands of children with disability. Skills such as Braille and sign language are essential for all types of students in regular school to create a collaborative environment in class (Hong et al., 2017). In such cases, the regular teacher needs to adopt differentiated instruction to support all types of children.

Lack of Expanded Core Curriculum

The expanded core curriculum is the knowledge and skill required for children with disability and the expertise and agility offered by the mainstream curriculum (Lieberman et al., 2014). The students are not provided additional knowledge and skills besides the existing curriculum. In this context, participant S3 emphasized as

> *Children with disability are not hungering for the repertoire of theoretical knowledge, but instead, we need the necessary skill and expertise to run out of daily life. The general education teacher does not like to skip from depositing traditional theoretical knowledge because the conventional approach dominates overall learning strategies.*

In this statement, the children with disability are not educated by using an expanded core curriculum. The meaning of theoretical knowledge is not much support and life career for children with a disability because students demand to learn how to have a settlement in society (Sapp & Hatlen, 2010). Basic skills and knowledge about life skills are essential for students with disability. So, the regular teacher frequently focuses on delivering skill-based education in addition to the core curriculum.

Lack of Peer Support

The additional support offered by the non-disabled peer during reading refers to the peer support in a regular class (Tuttle & Carter, 2022). It is very much essential, especially for children with disability who cannot follow the instructions of the teacher. Regarding this matter, participant S2 asserted,

> *We interact and share learning ways when I stay in the resource class. In resource class, we face common problems and solve them ourselves with the help of a support teacher. But, I could not have such an opportunity in the regular class while taking the course.*

In the above version, the students are experiencing an uneasy situation in a regular class without proper support from siblings. Generally, the non-disabled peers interact with regular students and share feelings with them in an accessible, frank manner. In such conditions, the student with a disability feels alone and deprived of classroom engagement in regular classes (Kef & Deković, 2004). In such a situation, the teacher must bridge between ordinary and students with additional needs. In the same context, another participant, S3, said,

> My bitter experience is that no friends support me during class. Sometimes, I could not follow the teacher's instructions perfectly and felt confused due to my vision problem. At this moment, friends refuse to assist me due to the fear of being late for running class.

In this statement, the students with a disability seek support from their non-disabled peers for attractive interaction in class, but non-disabled peers do not like doing that due to the limited time (Ely, 2014). In such cases, the teacher needs to provide an opportunity for students with disability to hold the class. The non-disabled students need to be aware of collaboration with students with disability (Celeste & Grum, 2010). The teacher must consider the multicultural class beautiful to achieve the organization's goal. The program relating to peer support for children with disability is essential for creating an inclusive atmosphere in school. The understating of the students with disability cultivates friendship within the cooperative environment.

Psychological Attachment

The emotional attachment to non-disabled peers in the regular class correlates with the psychological environment. This is the spiritual connection with classmates and in-depth interaction with friends (Cook et al., 2000). The psychological attachment to the classroom promotes the frequency of engagement in the learning process (Murray & Greenberg, 2006). In this context, participant S2 asserted,

> Sometimes, I feel alone when friends are attending sports meetings because I cannot participate effectively with my sighted friends. Although I like to play with them and feel backward in the direction of the teacher for content areas because my friends follow the instructions quickly, I cannot.

In this quotation, the children with disability are feeling humiliated by their hearts. Even though the sighted peer does not discriminate against children with disability, they feel uneasy compared to their non-disabled peers (Daniel, 1997). The respective teachers need to create a non-discriminatory environment so that children with a disability can feel identical to their typical peers (Skiba et al., 2006). The schools need to organize disabled-friendly sports, and teachers' demonstrations must be related to tactile figures (Sherpa & Baraily, 2021a). For the psychological support of students with disability, disabled extracurricular social activities need to be introduced. Appreciating the above quotation, participant S4 emphasized as

> I like to play with a friend but cannot participate with total effort because of my pitfalls. Participation in extracurricular activities maintains socio-emotional relations with colleagues.

Due to my low performance in sports, the team may be disqualified. As a result, the will to participate in sports competitions is killed. Quiz contests, speech contests, and music competitions are frequently organized within the school.

In this assertion, extracurricular activity is essential for the overall development of a child. Active participation in extracurricular activities keeps the mind fresh and maintains social harmony within the class (Murray & Greenberg, 2006). The knowledge of solidarity and moral education is achieved through interaction with friends. Administrative support is also essential for successful integration into extracurricular activities around the development of children with disability (Sijuola, 2022). Cognitive development is insufficient for student development for their career-seeking path.

Acceptance Challenges

The emotional and psychological barrier faced by students to be freely assimilated in the classroom with non-disabled peers intersects with acceptance threat. The students with disability are facing unwelcoming situations from the educators and sometimes from the school staff to access the academic activities within the school**.** Children with disabilities often face various challenges when it comes to acceptance and inclusion in school settings. Educators, parents, and society must address these challenges to create an inclusive and supportive environment. In this context, the participant said,

In the beginning, when I came to school with my parents for enrollment, the school administrator refused to admit me by saying there were no teachers to teach children with disability. Our school is to serve only children with non-disabled children. My parents took me to the next school far from my residence. The head teacher accepted me, and I got enrolled in general education.

In the above quotation, the institution does not accept students with disabilities well. The administrators are away from enrolling such types of students. They refuse to intake students with disabilities by showing resource limitations and a restricted child-friendly environment. Every child is legally preserved by law to get a basic education. Avoiding enrollment from school is to create absurdity for legacy. Every school needs to prepare for children's education regardless of discrimination (Sherpa et al., 2022). Education institutions must develop disabled-friendly infrastructure to serve all types of children with their features. Another participant said,

In this school, the children with disability are victimized by bullying and teasing due to the differences from friends as well as teachers. This caused me to feel isolated, low self-esteem and reluctance to attend school. Sometimes, I struggle with social interaction, making it difficult to form friendships, including social activities.

In the above quotation, the children with disabilities are victimized by the underestimated behavior of children without disabilities; unfriendly behavior leads to anxiety, frustration, isolation, and low self-esteem. The procedure to ensure a safe and inclusive environment seeks to enforce an anti-bullying policy that guides overall inclusive approaches within the school (Sherpa & Baraily, 2021a). Effective collaboration between schools and parents plays a crucial role in making decisions about the progress of children with special needs (Baraily, 2024b). Fostering acceptance and inclusiveness for children with a

disability requires a strong commitment to empathy and recognition of innate power. Another participant said,

> *The students and teachers in the general class are reluctant to understand the nature of a child's disability and keep misconceptions and stereotypes that hinder acceptance. The free and frank communication is lacking. Therefore, such types of communication lapses lead to frustration and social isolation.*

In the above assertion, information about the disability provides willingness and patience to serve children. Regular communication with the parents can cultivate empathy for delivering inclusive practices. It also becomes the catalyst for minimizing frustration and isolation. The mutual collaboration with parents develops trust towards the activity of children with disability for inclusive classrooms. Participant S3 said

> *The school environment is not disabled-friendly, and we need to face mobility challenges and difficulty navigating the school environment independently. Schools are not providing necessary accommodations and support services to help children with disability access the curriculum and participate fully in school activities.*

In the above narration, the existing physical infrastructure is unsupportive for children with disability to include in mainstream education. The navigation problem frequently occurs in the school (Kobayashi & Kuboyama, 2003). Children with a disability might fall into accidents in the drains and small ditches. In this context, the school needs to focus on developing disabled-friendly infrastructure so that the children with disability can easily navigate each corner of the school in the same mode. Frequent communication between parents and teachers is required to accommodate children in the school smoothly (Parker & Ivy, 2014). Another participant said,

> *Some student teachers or even parents might hold negative attitudes toward children with disabilities, which creates an unwelcoming atmosphere in the classroom. Teachers and peers might have unrealistic expectations of what a child with a disability can achieve academically and socially, leading to frustration and disappointment. The non-disabled peers do not know how to interact with us, which leads to avoidance.*

In the above concern, the teachers and parents keep stigmatized thoughts towards disability. The non-disabled peers are also keeping unrealistic assumptions about children with disability, which leads to frustration and anxiety (Puri et al., 2024). In such a context, the disability-accepted environment could not be created. So, disability awareness programs must be promoted to help students and staff and promote empathy and respect. The curriculum must be modified to be inclusive and reflect diverse abilities, backgrounds, and perspectives (Lindsay, 2007).

Lack of Peer Support Program

Pre-service, in-service, and refreshment training for teachers who teach in inclusive classrooms requires ongoing training to address the needs of learners with disabilities (Armour & Yelling, 2004). Maintaining accessible physical infrastructure within the school environment is a felt need to ensure inclusiveness (Sherpa & Baraily, 2021b). Developing and implementing an individualized education plan with necessary updates prevails to cater to each child's unique needs and interests (Jung, 2011). Disability-

related policies need to embark on holistic, inclusive education, ranging from preschool intervention to post-school transition (Baraily, 2021a). The procedure to ensure a safe and inclusive environment seeks to enforce an anti-bullying policy that guides overall inclusive approaches within the school (AR et al., 2018). Effective collaboration between schools and parents plays a crucial role in making decisions about the progress of children with special needs.

Conclusion

The challenges faced by students with disabilities in inclusive education settings within general classrooms are multifaceted and require careful consideration and proactive strategies for effective inclusion. These challenges stem from various sources, including societal attitudes, lack of teacher training and resources, inadequate infrastructure, and insufficient individualized support. Through collaborative efforts involving educators, policymakers, parents, and the broader community, it is possible to create an environment where students with disabilities can thrive academically, socially, and emotionally. Addressing these challenges requires a holistic approach that promotes awareness, fosters empathy, invests in professional development, ensures accessible facilities and materials, and tailors support to individual needs.

Finally, inclusive education holds the potential to enrich the educational experience for all students by promoting diversity, empathy, and a deeper understanding of one another. With the inclusion of children with disabilities, we can move closer to a more equitable and inclusive educational system that benefits every member of our society. Studying the challenges faced by students with a disability in inclusive education settings within the general classroom holds several important implications for various stakeholders, including educators, policymakers, researchers, and the broader community. The research study provides policymakers with valuable insights into the diverse needs of students with disability and enables educators to receive targeted training and professional development. This equips them with the knowledge and skills necessary to create an inclusive learning environment, develop effective teaching strategies, and appropriately support students with disabilities.

Acknowledgment

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