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INCLUSIVE EDUCATION PRACTICES IN REGULAR SCHOOLS IN MAHARASHTRA: IMPLEMENTING NCTE GUIDELINES

DR. TABISH KHAN,

Assistant Professor,

K M Asghar Husain College of Education, Akola

ABSTRACT

This paper examines inclusive education implementation in Maharashtra schools aligned with National Council of Teacher Education (NCTE) guidelines. Drawing on policy documents and empirical evidence, the study investigates infrastructure accessibility, teacher capacity, support services, and community engagement. The research identifies significant progress through Multipurpose Resource and Training Centres (MPRTCs) while revealing gaps between policy mandates and ground-level practice. Major barriers include inadequate infrastructure, insufficient teacher training, limited support services, and persistent attitudinal barriers. The paper provides recommendations for strengthening inclusive education through enhanced capacity building, infrastructure development, and policy coordination, contributing to Education for All objectives.

KEYWORDS: *Inclusive Education, Special Needs Education, Maharashtra, NCTE Guidelines, Teacher Training, Accessibility*

INTRODUCTION

Inclusive education represents a paradigm shift toward integrating children with disabilities into mainstream schools rather than segregated special institutions[1]. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006) and the Salamanca Statement (1994) established international foundations for inclusive education, emphasizing schools should accommodate all children regardless of disability[2]. In India, the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education (RTE) Act, 2009, institutionalized this commitment through Section 16, mandating that no child shall be denied admission based on disability[3].

Maharashtra has pioneered innovative inclusive education approaches through establishment of Multipurpose Resource and Training Centres (MPRTCs) and systematic integration of children with special needs in regular schools[4]. However, policy formulation and effective implementation remain disconnected. The National Council of Teacher Education (NCTE) has articulated comprehensive guidelines emphasizing inclusive curriculum development in pre-service teacher education programs[5]. Despite these policy developments, implementation reveals significant discrepancies between stated objectives and actual classroom practice.

This paper provides a concise examination of inclusive education practices in Maharashtra schools, focusing on NCTE guideline implementation, existing support systems, identified barriers, and evidence-based recommendations for strengthening provision. The study bridges academic discourse with practical insights for teacher educators, school administrators, and policymakers.

Conceptual Framework

Defining Inclusive Education

Inclusive education is fundamentally a process whereby schools adapt to meet diverse learner needs rather than expecting learners to conform to predetermined norms[1]. This transcends mere physical placement of disabled children in regular classrooms, encompassing pedagogical, infrastructural, attitudinal, and systemic dimensions[2]. UNESCO frameworks emphasize seven principles: recognizing all children can learn; ensuring equal participation opportunities; addressing diverse learning needs through flexible curricula; fostering belonging for all students; recognizing differences as enriching; enabling meaningful community participation; and creating accessible environments[3].

The RTE Act, 2009, defines inclusive education as providing educational opportunities for children with disabilities in regular schools, facilitating retention and integration[4]. The Rights of Persons with Disabilities (RPWD) Act, 2016, further mandates that children with benchmark disabilities have rights to mainstream education with appropriate accommodations[5].

NCTE Guidelines for Teacher Preparation

The NCTE has been instrumental in operationalizing inclusive education through teacher education reform. NCTE Guidelines emphasize inclusive education as core competency for all teachers, not specialized domain for special educators[5]. Critical components include: awareness of constitutional frameworks; knowledge of diverse learning needs; competency in differentiated instruction and curriculum adaptation; skill in creating accessible environments; proficiency in collaborative practices; and capability in parent partnership[6].

Status of Inclusive Education in Maharashtra

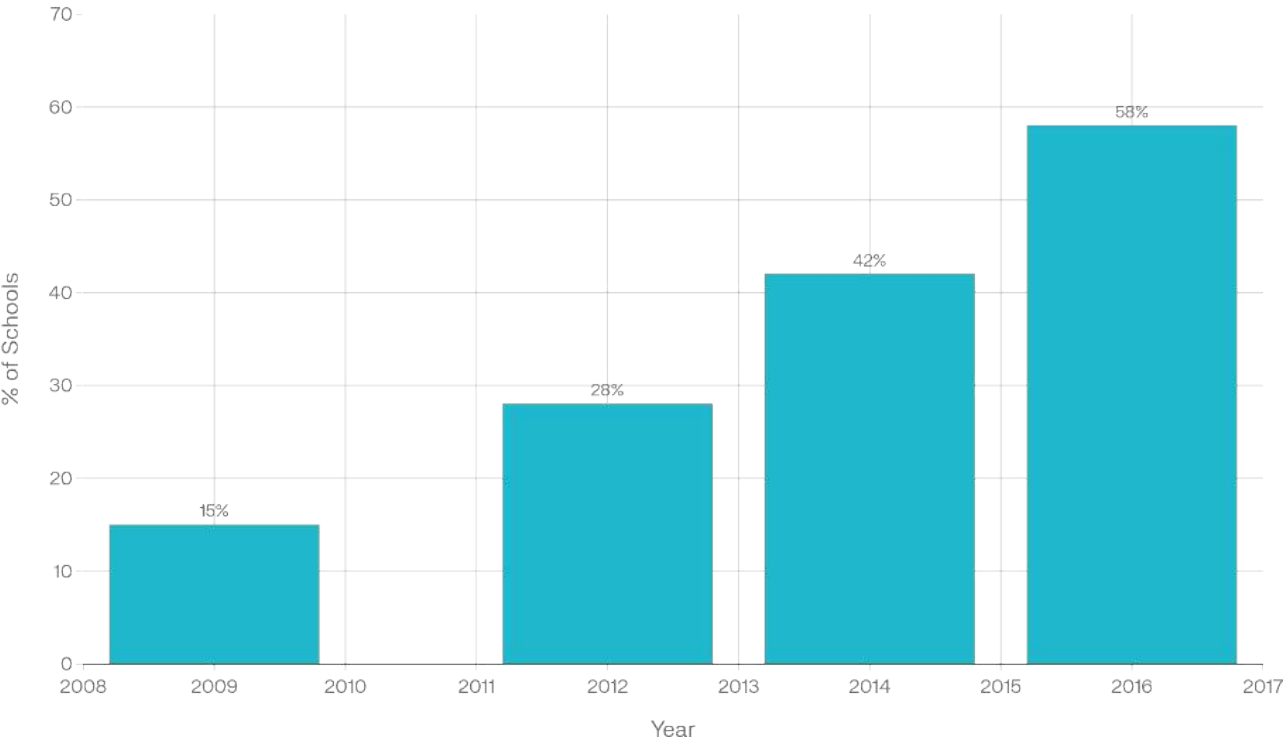
Institutional Framework

Maharashtra has established comprehensive institutional framework through MPRTCs across districts[4]. These centres identify children with special needs, provide diagnostic services, deliver

specialized therapies (speech, occupational, physiotherapy), and provide capacity building for mainstream teachers[7]. The decentralized model effectively extends services to rural areas where dedicated special schools are absent.

Rising Inclusive Education in Indian Schools (2009-2016)

Nearly quadrupled from 15% to 58% over seven years

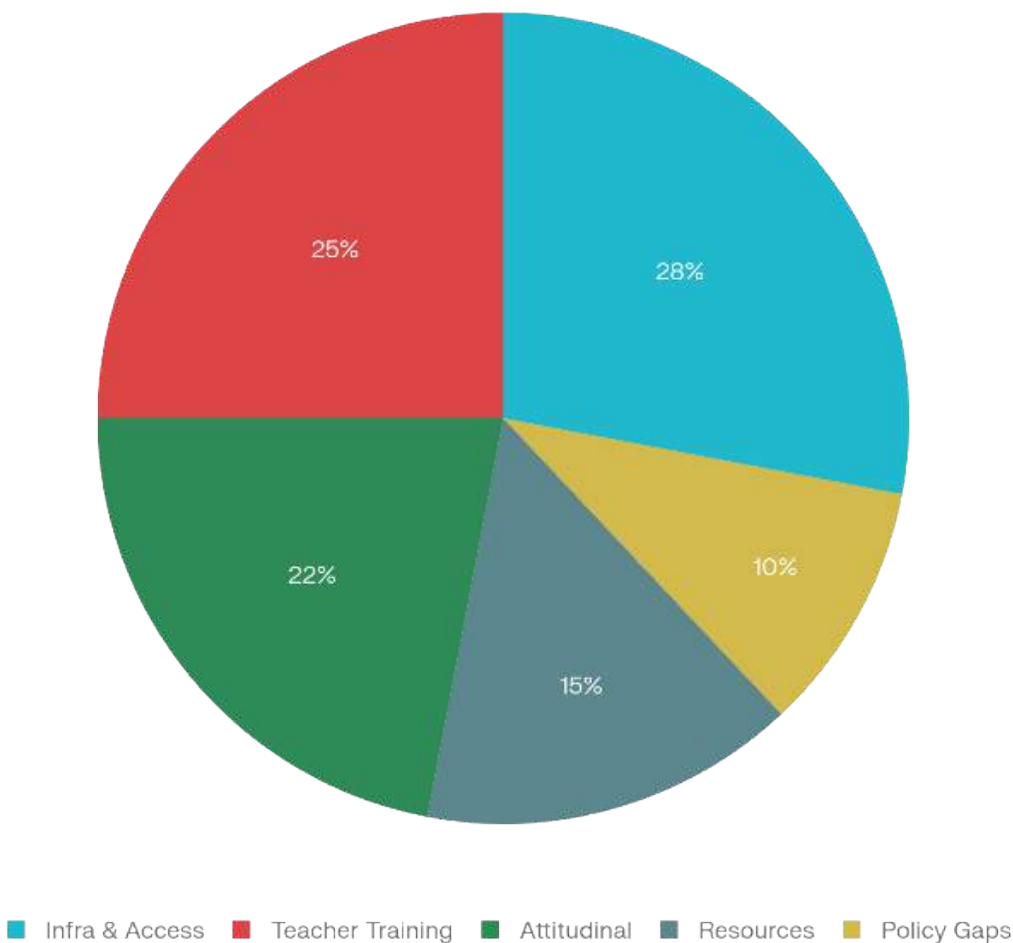


Maharashtra's infrastructure has expanded substantially, with school participation in inclusive education growing from 15% in 2009 to 58% by 2016, demonstrating significant institutional commitment.

Support Services Infrastructure

Barriers to Inclusive Education in Maharashtra Schools

Infrastructure challenges dominate implementation obstacles

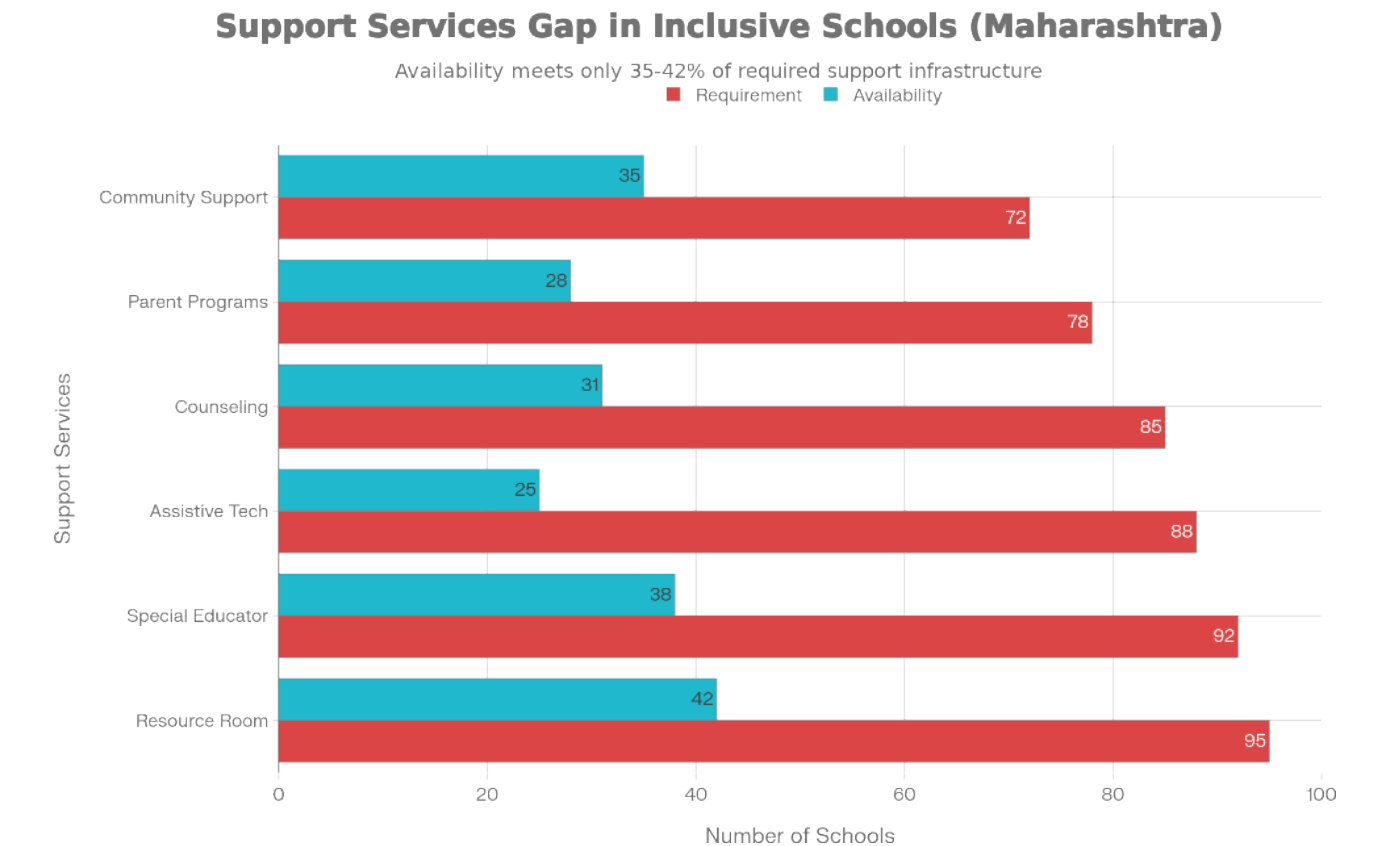


Analysis reveals critical gaps between available support services and requirements. Resource room facilities exist in 42 schools against requirement of 95; special educator support in 38 schools against 92 required; assistive technology in 25 schools versus 88 needed; counseling services in 31 schools against 85 required; parent engagement programs in 28 schools from 78 needed; and community support in 35 schools from 72 required[8]. This disparity highlights systemic resource constraints limiting inclusive education effectiveness, particularly acute in rural areas.

NCTE Guideline Implementation

Maharashtra's teacher education institutions have integrated inclusive education content into B.Ed. curricula through multiple approaches: dedicated courses on inclusive education; infusion across subject pedagogy courses; practicum experiences in inclusive settings; and exposure to assessment and adaptation strategies[6]. Universities have developed syllabi addressing constitutional frameworks, disability categories, assessment techniques, classroom management for diverse learners, curriculum adaptation, and parent engagement[7]. In-service training through Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan provides 90-day Foundation Courses recognized by Rehabilitation Council of India, focusing on sensitization, diverse learning needs, classroom adaptations, IEP preparation, and collaboration with special educators[8]. However, approximately 70% of regular teachers lack formal special education training[7], and program quality varies significantly, remaining primarily awareness-building

rather than skill-development oriented.
Barriers to Inclusive Education Implementation



Implementation confronts multiple barriers: infrastructure and accessibility issues constitute 28% of identified barriers; teacher training and capacity gaps account for 25%; attitudinal and social barriers represent 22%; resource constraints comprise 15%; and policy implementation gaps constitute 10%[8].

Infrastructure and Accessibility

Physical accessibility remains inadequately addressed in most schools[8]. Barriers include absence of ramps, inadequate toilet facilities, inaccessible classrooms on upper floors without elevators, lack of braille signage, and insufficient movement space for students with mobility difficulties. Resource room facilities remain underdeveloped; assistive devices including hearing aids, low-vision aids, and mobility devices are severely limited by budgetary constraints[8].

Teacher Capacity and Training Deficits

Significant gaps persist in teacher preparation for inclusive education[7]. Teachers lack confidence teaching students with disabilities, cite knowledge deficits as primary impediment, and report inadequate support systems. Absence of specialized training in curriculum

adaptation, assistive technology use, and behavioral support strategies constrains capacity for meaningful inclusive experiences.

Attitudinal and Social Barriers

Negative stereotypes about disability, beliefs that inclusive education compromises academic standards, and resistance to educational change persist despite policy implementation [8]. Teachers perceive inclusive education as additional burden rather than educational enrichment; social stigma surrounding disability creates resistive implementation contexts.

Foundational Practices Supporting Inclusion

Multipurpose Resource and Training Centres

The MPRTC model represents Maharashtra's most significant institutional innovation [4]. These centres identify children with special needs, provide diagnostic assessment, deliver therapeutic services, prepare identified children for regular school inclusion, and provide ongoing classroom support [7]. Key features include trained resource persons, tiered intervention systems, therapeutic provision, classroom-based support, individualized



education plan preparation, teacher training, and parent counselling [8].

Individualized Education Plans (IEPs)

IEPs, developed collaboratively by regular teachers, resource teachers, parents, and specialists, document student learning strengths and support needs, specify learning objectives, outline classroom modifications, identify specialized services, and establish monitoring procedures [8]. Curriculum adaptation guided by IEPs enables meaningful modification maintaining learning integrity while supporting students with disabilities alongside peers.

Community and Parent Engagement

Successful inclusion depends critically on



community understanding and support [8]. Maharashtra's initiatives include community awareness programs, parent mobilization, and community leader engagement in promoting inclusive values. Mothers of disabled children have been engaged as support staff; siblings sensitized to inclusion support; and community awareness

campaigns organized building social understanding of disability and inclusion.

Recommendations for Strengthening Inclusive Education

Teacher Education and Capacity Building

Strengthening teacher capacity remains paramount [5]. Recommendations include: comprehensive infusion of inclusive education content across curricula ensuring all teachers develop competency; expansion of practicum experiences in genuine inclusive settings; specialized diploma programs in special education; quality in-service training emphasizing skill development; mentorship systems pairing experienced with implementing teachers; and inclusion of special education content in school leadership programs [6].

Infrastructure Development

Systematic infrastructure development is essential [8]. Recommendations include: comprehensive accessibility audits identifying specific barriers and targeting modifications; dedicated budgets for barrier-free access including ramps, accessible toilets, elevators, and specialized furniture; resource room development with trained staff; procurement of assistive technology based on needs assessment; and universal design principles in construction and renovation projects.

Strengthening Support Services



mechanisms[8].

Enhanced support service delivery requires: appointment of sufficient resource teachers with clearly defined roles; formalized MPRTC-regular school linkage mechanisms; multi-disciplinary teams providing therapeutic and specialized educational services; technology-enabled support for remote areas; systematic organization of learning materials; and quality monitoring

Policy Coordination and Monitoring

Effective implementation requires: inter-departmental coordination among education, social welfare, health, and rehabilitation departments; clarified role definitions and accountability mechanisms at district, block, and school levels; context-specific monitoring indicators; regular evaluation using quantitative and qualitative methods; best practice dissemination; and community-based accountability mechanisms ensuring parental participation[7].

Discussion and Conclusion

Maharashtra's inclusive education implementation reflects significant progress and substantial challenges in translating policy into practice. NCTE guidelines provide comprehensive teacher education reform frameworks emphasizing inclusive curriculum development. Growth in school participation (15% in 2009 to 58% in 2016) demonstrates

institutional commitment and expanding access; the MPRTC model effectively decentralizes support services.

However, critical gaps persist between policy prescription and implementation reality. The significant gap between available and required support services, combined with persistent attitudinal barriers and infrastructure deficits, constrains quality inclusive experiences. Teacher capacity emerges as primary barrier and critical leverage point—while policy recognizes teacher preparation needs, implementation remains fragmented with limited curriculum integration and variable training quality.

Successful inclusive education requires simultaneous attention to multiple systemic dimensions: infrastructure, teacher education, support services, policy coordination, and community mobilization. Isolated interventions in single domains prove insufficient for genuine inclusion.

Inclusive education in Maharashtra represents both legal entitlement and educational imperative for realizing constitutional promises of equitable education for all children. Barriers are

multidimensional, requiring coordinated responses. Strengthening inclusive education demands sustained investment in teacher education reform, physical accessibility, support service development, policy coordination, and community mobilization. The achievement of genuinely inclusive schools wherein all children with and without disabilities learn together in supported, accessible, affirming environments remains aspirational, requiring continued commitment from educational authorities, teacher educators, school leaders, and communities. As India advances Sustainable Development Goal 4, Maharashtra's experiences offer valuable insights for broader national inclusive education agendas.

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