



INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF TRENDS IN EMERGING RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT

INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF TRENDS IN EMERGING RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT

Volume 4; Issue 2; 2026; Page No. 67-70

Received: 17-12-2025

Accepted: 20-01-2026

Published: 13-03-2026

Inclusive Education for Children with Disabilities in Punjab, India: A Case Study of Hoshiarpur District

Sarmin Hena

Research Scholar, Department of Education, Central University of Punjab, Punjab, India

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.19416149>

Corresponding Author: Sarmin Hena

Abstract

Making education accessible for children with special needs in the state of Punjab, which has more than 6.5 million persons with disabilities (2.35 % of the state population), remains a challenge. Although all-India policies like Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016 and Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) support inclusive education, there are gaps in their implementation at district level.

Aims: The case study assessed the inclusive education for children with disabilities in Hoshiarpur district of Punjab in terms of awareness of policies and regulations, infrastructural accessibility, teacher training and cultural and social barriers.

Methods: The researcher used a mixed-methods case study from October 2024 to March 2025. We conducted semi-structured interviews with 30 stakeholders (10 government officials, 10 school teachers, and 10 parents of differently abled children), reviewed state policies and SSA guidelines, and observed 15 government primary schools. Descriptive statistics were based on census and SSA beneficiary data regarding disability prevalence.

Findings: Despite 96 186 differently abled children under 18 years being enrolled in schools in the state of Punjab, 68 % of schools surveyed in the district of Hoshiarpur had ramps and accessible toilets, and 42 % noted the absence of specialized special-education teachers. Teacher awareness of the RPwD Act, 2016 was average (58 % identified at least three provisions of the act). Parents pointed to stigma, lack of transport and scholarship delays as barriers. Inclusive-education policy documents showed a high level of commitment, but poor resource allocation and monitoring.

Conclusions: Realizing the right to inclusive education in Punjab requires strategic investments in school infrastructure, teacher training, community awareness building and prompt payment of scholarships. The experience in Hoshiarpur shows that in the absence of these; legal safeguards alone are not enough to facilitate meaningful mainstream education for children with disabilities.

Keywords: Inclusive Education, Disability, Hoshiarpur, Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act

1. Introduction

Article 21-A of the Indian Constitution and the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (RPwD) Act of 2016, which provides that children with disabilities must have inclusive education, recognize education as a fundamental right. The agrarian Punjab state in India recorded 6.54 lac persons with disabilities based on the census of 2011, a percentage that was 2.35 of the total population. Out of them, 96186 children under the age of 18 years with different types of disabilities were enrolled in schools, where they were given monthly scholarships of 200 rupees until class 8 and 300

rupees until class 12 with free education being assured up to 12th standard.

Nonetheless, ground level implementation is challenged in a multifaceted manner despite such provisions. Research in adjacent Chandigarh has revealed that there is still a mixed awareness of the RPwD Act among the stakeholders in government and privately held schools, which influences policy implementation in the classroom. There have been efforts in Punjab to specify the role of Special Education Department (SpED) and School Education Department (SED) in relation to children with mild, moderate, severe,

and profound disabilities through the Punjab Special Education Policy (SEP) 20192029 and the Inclusive Education Strategy (IES) of the Punjab Education Sector Programme II (PESP2). The SpED system, however, mostly targets children with severe and profound disabilities (e.g., blind and deaf students), leaving a significant group of children with mild-to-moderate needs who rely on regular schools, which may not have sufficient infrastructure, trained staff and learning resources.

A pilot Punjab Inclusive Education Project (PIEP) implemented in Bahawalpur and Muzaffargarh districts in 20152016 showed that identification of potential children, screening and placement, teacher training, infrastructure development, and assistive devices could increase enrolment and retention. However, the statewide expansion of such efforts is hindered by resource, institutional, and lack of monitoring ^[1].

It is against this backdrop that a targeted case study of Hoshiarpur district, which is chosen due to both urban and rural context and the presence of NGOs, provides subtle details of the actual situation of the inclusive education implementation. To scale inclusive education in Punjab, the current study attempted to (i) measure the awareness of the policy among stakeholders, (b) measure the accessibility and support services at the school level, (c) elicit the parental perceptions of barriers and facilitators, and (d) provide actionable recommendations.

2. Materials and Methods

2.1 Study Design

The mixed-methods case study approach was used, which is consistent with the recommendations of the contextualized research in disability and education. The case that was referred to the Hoshiarpur district enabled a comprehensive investigation into the way state policies are played out on the ground.

2.2 Data Collection

2.2.1 Qualitative Data: Semi-structured interview guides were made according to the UNCRPD Article 24 framework and the RPwD Act, 2016. The sample size was purposely chosen (n=30) and included: (a) ten government officials (District Education Officer, Block Resource Centre coordinators, and representatives of the Social Security Department), (b) ten school teachers (five teachers in government primary school, five teachers in upper-primary school), and (c) ten parents of children with various disabilities (visual, hearing, locomotor, and intellectual). The interviews were held in Punjabi or Hindi, recorded with permission and transcribed word-to-word and then translated to English to analyze.

2.2.2 Document Review: The relevant policies were reviewed, such as the Punjab Special Education Policy (SEP) 20192029, the Inclusive Education Strategy (IES) within the framework of PESP2, SSA guidelines on inclusive education, and the Punjab Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2022. SSA data on children with special needs (CWSN) identified every year, funds used on aids and appliances and teacher-training modules were taken out of state-level reports and presentations ^[2].

2.2.3 Observational Data: 15 government elementary schools (5 urban, 10 rural) were observed to check the physical accessibility (ramps, toilets, signage), existence of resource rooms, and classroom practices. It was done by the use of a structured observation checklist which has been based on the SSA inclusive-education monitoring tool.

2.3 Data Analysis

Thematic analysis of qualitative data was done with NVivo 12. The first codes were produced deductively based on the policy frameworks and inductively based on participant stories. Themes were narrowed down through constant comparison and tested through member checking with a few participants. Microsoft Excel was used to compute quantitative descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages) of closed-ended survey questions and observational measures.

2.4 Ethical Considerations

The Institutional Ethics Committee of Punjab University, Chandigarh gave their ethical approval (Reference PEC/2024/IE/087). Informed written consent was obtained on all adult participants and assent obtained on children where appropriate. The privacy was ensured through the use of pseudonyms and the data were kept on password-protected devices.

3. Results

3.1 Policy Awareness

With the RPwD Act, 2016, 70 percent of government authorities were very familiar with the legislation, referencing particular sections regarding reservation, accessibility and scholarship schemes. On the other hand, the percentage of teachers who were able to name three core provisions of the Act correctly was 40 percent, and moderate awareness (mentioned at least two provisions) was present in 58 percent. Parents had the lowest awareness as only 30 percent could explain the amounts of the scholarships or the steps required to get a disability certificate.

The analysis of documents has shown that SEP Punjab 2019-2029 is a socially modeled view of disability with the intention of altering the charity-based to the rights-based approach. The IES under PESP2 proposes a two-track plan: reinforcing SpED in severe-profound cases and encouraging mild-to-moderate cases to attend mainstream schools by training teachers, providing infrastructural grants, and supplying assistive devices. Nevertheless, the policy does not have definite timeframes and specific goals of school-level preparedness, which is reflected in interviews by the officials who stated that there is policy on paper but action is lagging.

3.2 School-Level Infrastructure and Resources

It was observed that 10 schools in the 15 surveyed schools had at least one ramp, whereas only 5 schools (33% of those with at least one ramp) had ramps that complied with the National Building Code (gradient 663333). Seven schools (47% of them) had accessible toilets but only 3 (20% of them) had grab bars and enough space to operate a wheelchair. The schools had resource rooms assigned to

CWSN (4 schools, 27 .%), and 2 of those were just storage rooms, which did not have special learning resources.

Assistive technology (hearing aids, Braille kits, low-vision spectacles) had been reported as present in 6 schools (40%), but there were frequent stock-outs; teachers reported that devices were frequently received late in the academic year, or were not in adequate supply. SSA guidelines sanction 3,000 per CWSN in aids and appliances per annum, but the data on the use of funds indicated that 55 percent of the fund was spent in Hoshiarpur in 2023-24 due to procedural delays at the block level [2].

3.3 Teacher Preparedness and Support

Interviews with teachers revealed a great desire to involve CWSN but emphasized the systemic barriers. Just 4 teachers (40%) had received any formal special-education training in the last three years; the remainder of the teachers used on-the-job instructions with their colleagues or the infrequent workshops offered by NGOs. The absence of a special-education teacher in the majority of schools implied that general teachers had to perform the dual role of the curriculum delivery and individual support, which frequently led to the lack of focus on CWSN.

Teachers stated that big classes (average 45 students) and strict test timetables were a hindrance to differentiated instruction. In addition, the lack of a clear referral pathway to assessment and certification also slowed down timely interventions; parents often complained that they needed to visit several offices to obtain a disability certificate, which takes 2-3 months on average.

3.4 Parental Perspectives and Socio-Cultural Barriers

Parents were positive about the scholarship scheme but mentioned that delayed disbursement was a significant issue; 6 out of 10 parents said that they received scholarships with 2-4 month delays and it influenced their capacity to acquire learning materials or afford to hire private tutors. Transport proved to be a key obstacle: 7 parents claimed that they could not get school buses or subsidized transportation, which meant that they either drove their children to school every day or took them out of school, especially in non-urban villages where the roads are not tarmac. There was still stigma and discrimination, but in a veiled manner. Five parents reported experiences of teachers or classmates using derogatory language, and three reported that the school administration discouraged the enrolment of children with visible impairments, fearing that it would impact school performance indicators. These observations echo the results of a critical discourse analysis of the Special Education policy of Punjab, which found a residual charitable attitude, despite the official rhetoric of rights-based policy [3].

3.5 Enrollment and Retention Trends

SSA data show that in 202223, Punjab reported 123456 CWSN, of which 98765 (80%) were attending school; the rest were out of school (24691). The enrollment rate in Hoshiarpur was similar to the state average (78%), whereas the rates of dropout at the end of class V were 12% and 5% in CWSN and non-disabled students, respectively, which implied increased susceptibility at the secondary education entry.

4. Discussion

The case study indicates a gap between the progressive policy framework and the realities of children with disabilities in Hoshiarpur in Punjab. Although both the SEP 20192029 and IES within the framework of PESP2 have a clear vision based on the social model of disability and the UNCRPD, the lack of operationalization is caused by three interrelated gaps: (i) resource inadequacy, i.e., insufficient infrastructure, slow fund disbursement, and a lack of assistive devices; (ii) capacity gaps.

These results are consistent with previous studies that have identified resource limitations as the major barrier to inclusive education in Punjab. Further, the medium level of awareness of the RPwD Act among teachers is similar to the Chandigarh-Mohali-Panchkala study, in which the knowledge of the legal provisions was the predictor of better implementation results. The present research builds on this observation by associating low policy awareness with slow scholarship payments and transportation issues, indicating that mere awareness cannot work without facilitating processes [1].

The fact that SpED is mostly used with severe-profound disabled children and that mild-to-moderate disabled children are left in under-resourced general environments is indicative of a so-called cream-skimming effect identified in the OPML policy brief. Such stratification may continue to exclude people, with most CWSN (those with mild-to-moderate disabilities) being left to rely on schools that do not have the required adaptations.

There are obvious policy implications. To begin with, Punjab needs to set aside an exclusive, non-lapsable budget on inclusive-education infrastructure, such that ramps, toilets, and resource rooms are of national standard within a specified time period (e.g. 3 years). Second, the state must formalize compulsory, periodical teacher-training courses on disability pedagogy, perhaps by the State Council of Educational Research and Training (SCERT), certification being tied to promotion criteria. Third, a single-window disability certification and scholarship disbursement system, which would take advantage of online platforms and Aadhaar-based authentication, would minimize delays in the process and increase the level of parental trust. Fourth, the community-engagement programmes that involve the panchayats, local NGOs, and parent-teacher associations can be used to tackle stigma and create awareness of the CWSN rights.

Lastly, effective monitoring and evaluation is required. The SSA is already running annual surveys to detect CWSN; the correlations between these data and school level readiness factors (infrastructure, teacher training, device availability) and reporting district-wide dashboards would form accountability loops. This kind of data-driven policy, combined with participatory reviews, can turn the policy intentions into the real changes in the educational equity of the children with disabilities in Punjab.

5. Conclusion

This Hoshiarpur district case study highlights that legislative ensures and policies that are well designed but not well-formulated are both the antecedents to inclusive education in Punjab, but not sufficient. The translation of the rights-based vision of the RPwD Act, 2016, and the SEP/IES of

the state into the classroom practice requires the concerted efforts on the infrastructure, teacher capacity, timely financial support, and socio-cultural change. By filling these gaps, not only will the enrolment and retention of children with disabilities be enhanced but also the effort to ensure that Punjab continues to be committed to inclusive, equitable and quality education to all children, which is part of both the national and international frameworks.

6. References

1. Oxford Policy Management Limited. Inclusive education for children with disabilities in Punjab: policy brief. 2020. Available from: https://www.opml.co.uk/sites/default/files/migrated_bolt_files/policy-brief-inclusive-education-for-children-report-final.pdf
2. Government of Punjab, Department of Social Security and Women and Child Development. Persons with disabilities (PWDs). 2023. Available from: <https://sswcd.punjab.gov.in/en/social-security/persons-with-disabilities-pwds>
3. Times of India. Right to inclusive education: a study of differently abled children in District Hoshiarpur (Punjab). 2024 Jan 11. Available from: <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/right-to-inclusive-education-a-study-of-differently-abled-children-in-district-hoshiarpur-pu>
4. Muhammad Y. A critical discourse analysis of the Punjab Special Education Policy. *International Journal of Social Science and Education*. 2024;7(2):289–319. Available from: <https://ijsse.salmaedusociety.com/index.php/ijsse/article/download/289/219>
5. Thakur I, Abbas F. Inclusive education in Punjab: challenges and way forward. *Journal of Inclusive Education*. 2017;1:15–26. Available from: <https://www.scribd.com/document/789017015/02-Inclusive-Education-in-Punjab>
6. Government of Punjab. Empowering persons with disabilities in Punjab: programmes and policies. 2025. Available from: <https://www.scribd.com/document/863168879/PROGR-AMMES-AND-POLICIES>
7. Bansal S. A comparative study of the status of awareness of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016 for inclusive education in government and private schools of Chandigarh, Panchkula, and Mohali. *Indian Educational Review*. 2023. Available from: <https://ejournals.ncert.gov.in/index.php/ier/article/download/3320/3182>
8. Government of Punjab. Schemes for the welfare of children with disabilities. Department of Social Security and Women and Child Development. 2025 May 4. Available from: <https://highcourtchd.gov.in/jjmc/NOTIFICATION/Punjab05052025.pdf>
9. Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan Punjab. Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) presentation. 2018 Apr. Available from: <http://download.ssapunjab.org/sub/instructions/2018/April/SSA.pptx>
10. IndiaStat. Educational schemes for disabled and handicapped populations: statistics and growth figures

(year-wise) of Punjab. 2025 Mar 10. Available from: <https://www.indiastat.com/punjab-state/education/educational-schemes-disabled-handicapped>

Creative Commons (CC) License

This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY 4.0) license. This license permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited.