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Research Paper

Inclusive Education and Social Equality: A Sociological Perspective

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ABSTRACT

Concerns over inclusive education first emerged from within special education, primarily focusing on educational opportunity for disabled children. These concerns, which were initially considered niche, are now global policy concerns. Inclusive education is generally defined as policy-level attempts to remove social barriers (social status, class, caste, religion, and gender) to the realization of educational opportunities. In this article, I analyze inclusive education from a sociological perspective. In modern society, education opportunity is an illusion. I show that schools reinforce social division, marginalization, and inequality. In doing so, I use functionalist, conflict, symbolic interaction, and social reproduction theory. I also draw on capability approach theory to further argue that inclusive education is the only effective educational strategy for eliminating societal divisions. In India, there are social barriers, especially caste and class, that prevent people from achieving their potential in the educational system. The interplay between societal barriers and social inclusion policies in India is studied using research documents, analysis of legislation, and a variety of qualitative methods. In India, education continues to have the same old divisions as a society. For inclusive education to serve as more than just a cover-up, changes must take place in structural systems and pedagogic practices. Without those changes, efforts such as the Right to Education Act will never result in inclusion. To understand what can promote equality, this paper looks at pedagogies and practices.

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background Context

The Paradox of modern education. On the one hand, it's meant to eliminate the impact of socio-economic circumstances. But there is a substantial amount of literature and evidence that demonstrates that education just continues inequality. This is why many advocates and educators promote inclusive education.

Historically, the term "inclusive education" was associated with educating students with disabilities. More recently, the focus of inclusive education has shifted from students with disabilities to educating all children with similar needs. The best-known statement about this issue is the Salamanca Statement of 1994, which outlined the concept of inclusive education for everyone, including those with disabilities. Inclusive education has gained importance, as a priority of the Sustainable Development Goals, through initiatives such as UNESCO.

In light of its new focus, inclusive education now shifts to analyzing entire education systems, focusing on the structures that create the institutionalized practices of inclusion. Education, the inclusive way, then shifts from a discourse on social justice, to a focus on social equality, and most importantly social inclusivity.

1.2 Problem Statement

This paper examines why inclusionary policies and greater access to schooling have not prevented educational exclusion for most disadvantaged groups. While most disadvantaged people can now physically go to school, most face subtle yet deeply problematic exclusion such as alienation within school, lagging behind classmates, and social and cultural exclusion. Simply gaining entrance to school is not the answer, as the deep-rooted societal mechanisms of inequality will continue to exist within an educational system that is on the surface more inclusive. To better understand why inequality within the system exists and how true inclusion is achieved, a sociological approach must be used (Govinda and Bandyopadhyay: 15).

1.3 Research Gap

Much of the scholarship around inclusive education exists in special education and educational studies, and focuses primarily on school practices, teacher training, and particular accommodations. While these scholars' work is helpful, they often address inclusion as an issue that is school-centric and can be easily fixed without any consideration of wider societal issues like caste, gender, class, and social power, all of which influence inclusion in school, and the terms upon which a child is included. Conversely, educational inequality sociology papers focus more on analyzing social inequality, but fail to fully examine the ideas and methods used in inclusive education. There needs to be a marriage of ideas, such that inclusive education can be more comprehensively analyzed with sociology, and put into the context of inequality. This paper intends to merge the two ideas, with a particular focus on India.

1.4 Research Questions and Significance

In sociological terms, there are three key questions to address: First, why should sociology study inclusive education, especially with reference to social equality? Second, what is the role of barriers to the effective implementation of inclusive education? These include social, cultural, and structural barriers. Third, how do sociological concepts assist in policy design for inclusive education?

In India, these three questions take on unique urgency and importance because of India's social and cultural realities. Educational systems have traditionally been social mechanisms for reinforcing and maintaining inequality. The provision of inclusive education through effective social reform offers potential for breaking these trends. In contrast to policy that is rigid, bureaucratic, and social order preserving, progressive education policies must have flexible, restructuring, and activist approaches to social reform. This paper begins to outline sociological concepts that will be applied throughout the rest of this study. It includes a definition of inclusive education as well as a review of related literature. The next sections will address barriers and enablers in the case of India and will conclude with implications for policy formulation.

2. OBJECTIVES

This paper will look at how the sociological issues of equality and inclusion interact, specifically as those issues pertain to the concept of inclusive education. I begin by describing the definition of inclusive education in the paper and identifying the dimensions of inclusion. The relationship between inclusion and inequality in education is examined through several sociological theories. Several of the issues hindering genuine inclusion are analyzed, and there are many opportunities and mechanisms identified for overcoming some of these hurdles. These theories are then analyzed within the context of Indian society with its multidimensional inequality. There are many implications and suggestions provided in terms of policies, practices, and further research.

3. Scope of the Study

The scope of this study explores both concepts and the social processes surrounding inequality and inclusion. Our focus is a modern conceptualization of inclusion as incorporating more people who may have multiple different disadvantages. This perspective of inclusion is broad as compared to previous conceptualizations of inclusion, which focused more on disabilities. Classical sociological theories have been used to analyze the current system of education, especially as it relates to India. India has many legislative

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mandates for inclusion, yet there are many inequities that currently exist due to the vast and varying divisions that exist within society.

The focus of this study was primarily to analyze other studies that have already been conducted rather than trying to come up with new surveys or focus groups to collect primary data. The study didn't look at other countries' educational systems or the mechanics of accommodating people with disabilities unless it had a sociological bearing. India and its system was the primary focus of this study.

4. Conceptualising Inclusive Education

4.1 From Integration to Inclusion

Integration and inclusion are two different but related concepts. In the context of learners with disabilities, integration can mean enrolling learners who were excluded from a particular environment, and placing them in an environment that is currently dominant and requiring them to adapt to that dominant environment. Integration has many facets but can be most simply described as putting learners who were previously excluded in a place where they must adapt to the new, existing environment. This contrasts with inclusion, which, as integration asks learners to fit in, inclusion asks the institution to transform to meet the needs of all learners (Rao, p. 174). Inclusion also has social implications because it locates exclusion in the system and society that has exclusion as a part of its foundation, as opposed to an individual shortcoming on the part of the excluded. Sen explains exclusion in his book, *Development as Freedom*, where he argues that an excluded person has not failed to fit in because of a lack of some personal characteristic. Rather, exclusion happens because the system is designed to meet the needs and personal characteristics of a group of people who are dominant in society. (p. 75).

4.2 The Layers of Inclusion

There are multiple dimensions to inclusion, rather than it being a single state of being. Of the dimensions that are commonly referred to, there are three: access, participation and achievement. Access refers to whether there are barriers preventing a person from getting to a certain point in a system, which can include the physical placement and the presence of schools, the affordability of these schools, and the ease with which individuals can travel to the schools. Participation refers to whether, once a learner has gained access to a school, there is engagement with both learning and school life, with respect, as opposed to the learners merely being there. There is also academic and social exclusion. Achievement refers to what a person can actually do, in terms of learning and outcomes. Each of the three dimensions of inclusion must be present. A system could provide access to a certain level but not allow participation. There is also the potential of there being participation but not achievement. A lack of both achievement and participation are what really lead to social inequality within inclusive systems. This idea forms the core of my argument, as highlighted by Sen's *The Idea of Justice* (p. 112).

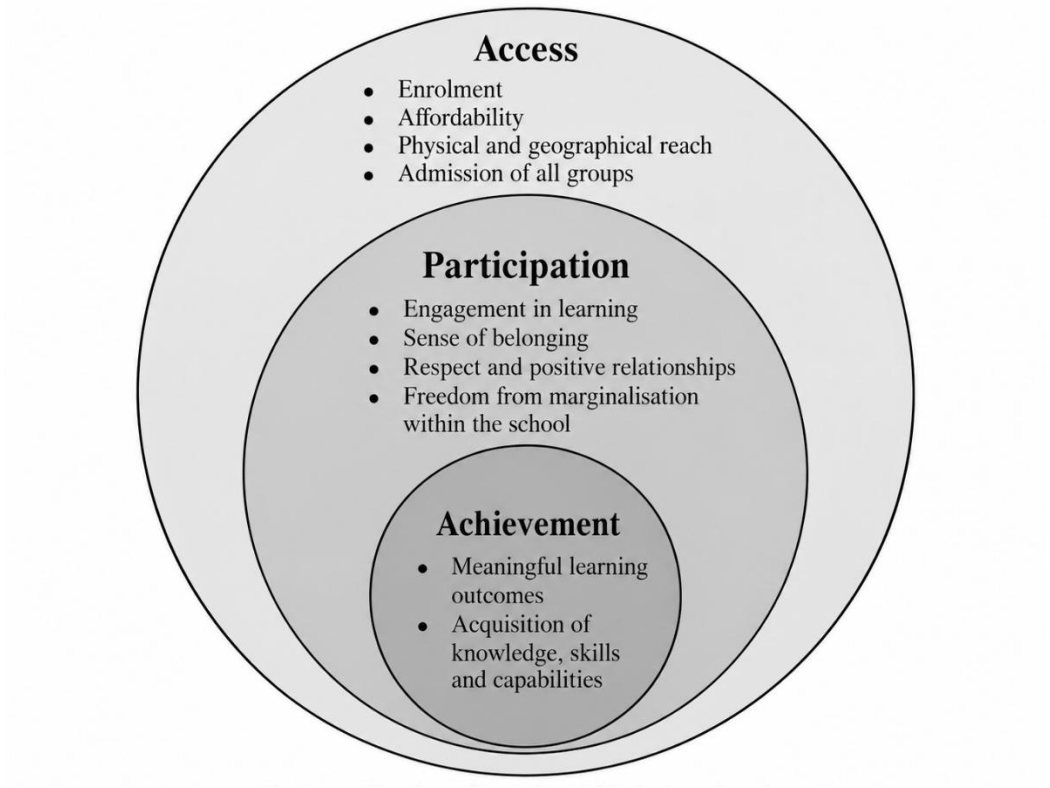


Figure 1. The three dimensions of inclusive education

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4.3 Inclusion and Social Equality

The focus on inclusion revolves around the concept of social equality. It is simply not realistic to make everything equal. People cannot have the same social status, resource and opportunity across the board. The goal is to avoid granting any social group with privilege while disadvantage other groups. Education is, without a doubt, the most important of all social resources. Some might consider job opportunity or social status more important, but the former is crucial as education often acts as the key to opportunities for people to achieve the latter. This inequality across educational opportunity results in the accumulation of advantages across social classes, making it more difficult for others to change their lot. For these reasons, inclusive education must tackle the root cause, which is a broader sociology question.

5. Education, Sociology and Inequality

5.1 Functionalism

Sociologist Emile Durkheim established the functionalist theory of education. In this theory, the function of education is to maintain the structure of society by training students in behaviors and social attitudes as well as by sorting them. Durkheim advocated for inequality as long as there is an open system of competition that rewards merit. Excluding some students undermines the entire society by depriving all of their contribution. Durkheim has received some criticism for ignoring the ways education systems structure inequality, allowing some students to easily pass merit, while other students must struggle to achieve it.

5.2 The Conflict Perspective

According to Karl Marx, education supports the dominant group's monopoly of power and social class inequality. The education system's role is to keep members of each social class in their social position. It is like an sorting mechanism for capitalist society. Success or failure is believed to be solely the results of efforts and individual attributes, so education can be seen as an explanation of why people can be blamed for failure. Education provides rationalizations as to why people at the top are supposed to be at the top and why people at the bottom are supposed to be at the bottom. This results in the maintenance of unequal privileges in society (Newman, 126). From this perspective, education is an instrument of domination.

5.3 Symbolic Interactionism

The interactionist perspective places emphasis on day-to-day encounters in the school system as opposed to structural features on the macro level. Teachers place labels on children and establish expectations that then mold children's experiences. Teacher labelling along with the self-fulfilling prophecy (setting low expectations for students of certain demographic groups) can result in those students achieving less.

In this way, interactionism can show how just providing equal access to schooling fails to achieve actual inclusion. When children with the most advantages enter a school, that school, while claiming to be inclusive, can have little inclusion because certain children, particularly of a lower class, will face low expectations. This micro perspective explains why schools allow macro levels of inequalities to remain.

5.4 Bourdieu on Cultural Capital and Social Inequality

A more critical perspective is provided by Bourdieu's analysis of the cultural capital inequalities within educational institutions. This theory contends that institutions are good at disguising the unequal reality by presenting a seemingly equitable picture of the situation. He explains this using his theory of cultural capital.

This theory refers to the attributes of any individual including their ability to speak, language preference, appreciation of culture, etc., as their cultural capital. Bourdieu explains that parents who have more cultural capital than other families have a higher likelihood of teaching their children attributes valued by schools. Those families that do not have such capital will find it much more difficult to compete with those of more privileged backgrounds, especially when educational institutions praise attributes of some while blaming those without on an individual basis.

The inclusion of children with more cultural capital results in unequal outcomes because, although children of different socioeconomic backgrounds are provided access, more cultural capital is valued by educational institutions because of its potential of being developed in the homes of the wealthy.

5.5 Amartya Sen's Capability Approach

Amartya Sen coined the term "capability approach" to challenge how education is traditionally viewed. Sen claims that money and laws do not equate to education. Education's purpose is freedom of the individuals' right to create their own future. For Sen, education is invaluable as it is its own freedom. It also supports the creation of even more freedoms. To Sen, equal legal access to education is insufficient for the realization of the full inclusion of people in society. For example, he presents two students. Each student has equal right to access an education but, they are not actually equally capable. This disparity in education can be caused by unequal circumstances. In addition to equality of access, Sen argues that individuals must have access to, and more importantly participate in and attain education. In addition, the systems that exclude people from enjoying educational opportunities should be removed.

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A Comparison of Approaches

Different approaches to inequality and the education system's role in address inequalities often seem at odds with each other, but the truth is they complement each other. Each approach has a slightly different take on the issues, and these different perspectives are often insightful. Below is a summary table illustrating how each approach interprets inequality, as well as the approach's take on the system's potential to make inequality worse or better.

Table 1. Sociological perspectives on education, inequality and inclusion

Perspective	View of education	Explanation of inequality	Implication for inclusive education
Functionalism	A meritocratic institution that socialises and allocates individuals by ability	Differences in individual ability and effort	Supports inclusion as opportunity, but overlooks structural advantage
Conflict theory	A mechanism that reproduces class structure and legitimises inequality	Structural power of dominant economic groups	Sceptical: inclusion without structural change reproduces disadvantage
Symbolic interactionism	A site of everyday interaction, labelling, and expectation	Labelling and self-fulfilling prophecies in classrooms	Explains why access does not ensure participation or achievement
Bourdieu (cultural capital)	A system that rewards inherited cultural capital as if it were merit	Unequal distribution of cultural capital by family	Access alone is insufficient; the school's reward structure must change
Sen (capability approach)	A valuable capability that expands other freedoms	Unequal real freedom to convert resources into functionings	Inclusion must secure substantive capability, not just formal access

Note: The perspectives operate at different levels: macro-structural (functionalism, conflict), micro-interactional (interactionism), and relational/normative (Bourdieu, Sen): and are best read as complementary lenses on a single complex reality.

6. LITERATURE REVIEW

6.1 Education and Social Reproduction

A lot of studies back up a key point from the reproduction perspective. School results are closely linked to a learner's social background in nearly every society. Many papers report the same pattern. Children from better-off households usually do better in school. They often remain in education longer. They also tend to earn higher status qualifications. Even when researchers compare students with similar measured ability, the gap still shows up. These findings support what Bourdieu argued. They also suggest the background and achievement link is not a one off oddity. It looks like a steady feature built into education. Inclusive education should be read in this setting. Inclusion aims to reduce a strong link that stays in place. It can show up again in other ways even when old barriers fade. (UNESCO, Global Education Monitoring Report 2020: 45).

6.2 The Evolution of Inclusive Education Policy

The literature shows an obvious change over time in how people define inclusive education. At first, the idea was tied to special education. Later, the focus moved toward a broader view based on rights. This shift appears in major international texts. Examples include the Salamanca Statement and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. It is also reflected in the Sustainable Development Goals. The same sources explain that inclusion is not just about fitting certain groups into an unchanged school setup. Instead, the idea is that education systems must change so they can work for all learners. The literature also points to a stubborn mismatch. The language about inclusion can be wide and strong. But the actual results on the ground are often narrower. Some systems improve entry into school. Still, many continue to struggle to raise participation and achievement for groups that sit on the margins.

6.3 Inclusive Education and Social Equality in India

A large body of work looks at schooling and inequality in India. The issue of who gets included is not simple there. Social lines overlap in ways that make the problem harder to untangle. Many studies trace how lower castes, especially Dalits, were pushed out of education for a long time. They also show that unfair disadvantages still persist even though the constitution bans untouchability and the country has strong reservation and support policies.

Other research reports similar patterns for Adivasi communities. It also covers religious minorities, including Muslims. Girls and women face barriers too. So do children with disabilities. The rural poor and the urban poor also report reduced chances. These disadvantages do not sit side by side. They meet, overlap, and can build on one another. The literature also reviews how India has responded with policy. It points to the constitutional promise of education. It highlights the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act of 2009, which made basic schooling a right. It also notes the National Education Policy, which supports the aim of schooling that is inclusive and fair.

Overall, the findings are consistent. These commitments have helped more children get into school. Enrolment has improved. Yet real gaps still remain in who participates well and who achieves. The largest shortfalls show up for people who start out with the fewest options. That is the main worry of the analysis that comes next.

6.4 Synthesis and Positioning

Seen as a whole, the literature gives this paper three building blocks. First, educational inequality is rooted in the structure of society. It tracks closely with social background. Second, inclusive education has grown into a wide guiding idea, but the practice often lags behind the message. Third, in a

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country like India, inclusion has to face several linked sources of harm, not just one.

The literature does not always do this next step. It often stops short of bringing the pieces together in one clear account. This paper tries to do more. It uses an explicitly sociological lens. It connects inclusion to the structural conditions, the cultural patterns, and the everyday interactions that block inclusion.

7. METHODOLOGY

7.1 Research Approach

This study uses a qualitative method built around documents. It fits a theoretical and analytical goal. The focus is on concepts, ideas, and social processes. It is not on counting variables or running new measurements. So the study draws on existing scholarship and already recorded evidence. It then synthesises and interprets what is there. It does not produce fresh primary data.

This kind of approach is common in sociological theory and in interpretive social research. The value comes from clarifying concepts, linking theories, and offering critical reading. It is less about statistical tests.

7.2 Sources and Selection

The work uses three kinds of material. First, it relies on core theory from the sociological traditions named in the study. This includes writings by Durkheim and Marx, along with the conflict theorists and the interactionists. It also draws on Bourdieu and Sen. Second, it uses research on educational inequality and inclusive education. These sources come from reviewed journal articles and academic books. Third, it uses policy papers and reports. This includes global policy frames, plus Indian policy documents and relevant laws. The sources were chosen because they fit the topic and were seen as credible. The aim was to cover both well-known statements of the ideas and newer empirical and policy writing. More attention was given to work that relates directly to India.

7.3 Analytical Procedure

The analysis started by setting out what inclusion means in this study, and what dimensions are used. Next, each sociological view was brought in to show how education links to inequality. After that, the barriers to inclusion were listed and grouped. Alongside these, the factors that may help inclusion were also identified.

Then the whole set of points was tested against the Indian setting. From there, the study drew implications for policy.

Across the steps, the goal was to join theory with evidence from research and policy materials. The intent was to keep the analysis tied to concepts, while still being useful for practice.

7.4 Limitations

This is a theoretical and document-based study. It does not report fresh data collected through fieldwork. The conclusions are based on analysis, not on new measurements.

Because the focus is on India, the discussion offers depth and context. But how well it fits other places may depend on local conditions, so some change could be needed. Still, the theoretical claims are meant to have wider value.

Source choice and interpretation also involve judgement. That is common in interpretive work.

8. Analysis: Barriers and Enablers of Inclusion

8.1 Categorising the Barriers

Drawing the sociological perspectives together, the barriers to genuine inclusion can be grouped into three categories: structural, cultural and interactional. Structural barriers are the material and institutional obstacles rooted in the organisation of society and its resources: poverty, the cost of education, the geographical distribution of schools, the quality of provision in disadvantaged areas and the broad divisions of class, caste and region that shape access. Cultural barriers are those arising from the mismatch between the culture of the school and that of disadvantaged learners: the privileging of dominant languages, knowledge and dispositions, which corresponds to Bourdieu's cultural capital, as well as prejudices and stereotypes that devalue particular groups. Interactional barriers are those enacted in everyday encounters within the school: the labelling, low expectations, discrimination and exclusionary practices that marginalise learners even when they are formally included. These three categories map onto the three levels addressed by the sociological perspectives and together account for the gap between access and genuine participation and achievement.

Table 2. Barriers to Inclusive Education and Corresponding Enablers

Type of barrier	Examples	Corresponding enablers
Structural	Poverty, cost of schooling, distance, unequal provision, class/caste/regional divisions	Free and compulsory education, targeted funding, school provision in underserved areas, affirmative action
Cultural	Privileging of dominant language and knowledge, stereotypes, devaluation of marginalised cultures	Multilingual and culturally responsive curricula, representation of diverse cultures, anti-bias measures
Interactional	Teacher labelling, low expectations, discrimination, peer exclusion	Teacher training and sensitisation, high expectations for all, inclusive pedagogy, supportive school climate

Note: The enablers address barriers at the corresponding level, but structural, cultural, and interactional barriers reinforce one another, so effective inclusion requires action across all three simultaneously.

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8.2 The Relationship between Barriers and Dimensions
These barriers operate on the dimensions of inclusion in a patterned way. Structural barriers principally obstruct access, determining whether learners can enter the system at all. Cultural and interactional barriers principally obstruct participation and achievement, determining whether learners who have gained access can engage fully and succeed. This explains a pattern observed repeatedly in the literature and in the Indian case: policies that address structural barriers, such as making education free and compulsory, can achieve dramatic gains in access while leaving participation and achievement largely untouched, because the cultural and interactional barriers remain in force. Genuine inclusion therefore requires action on all three categories of barrier simultaneously; addressing only the structural level produces presence without belonging, and access without achievement.

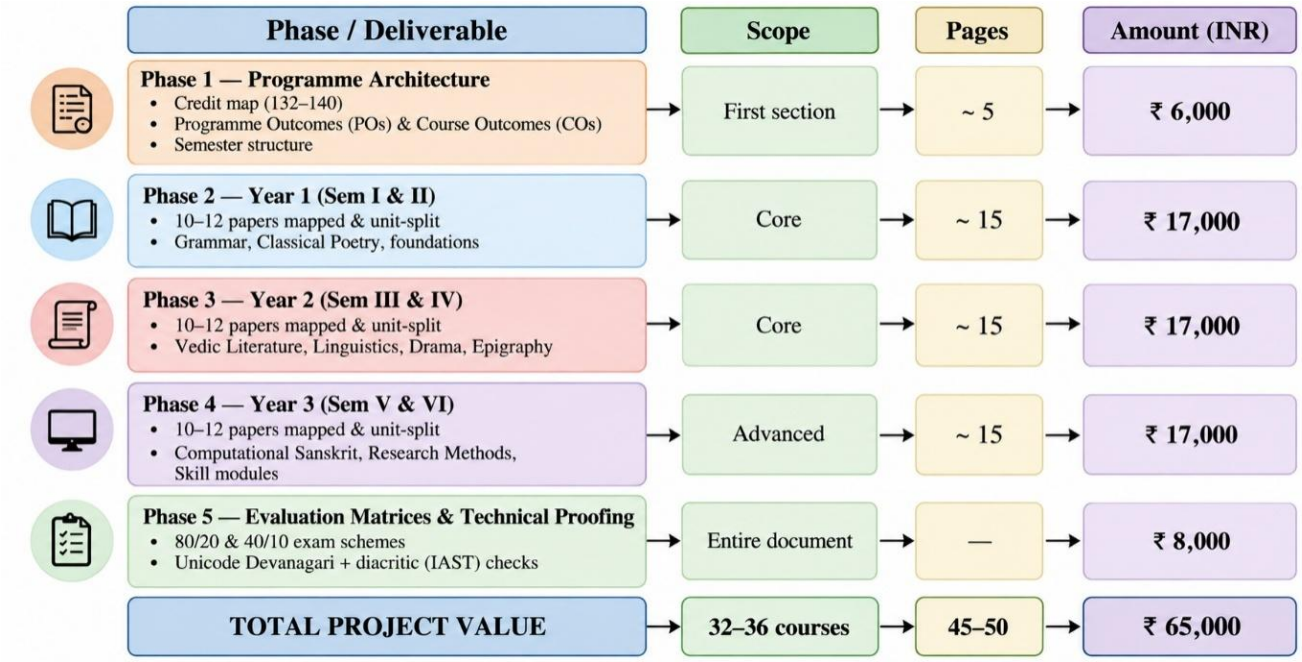


Figure 2. A framework linking barriers, dimensions and enablers of inclusion

8.3 The Indian Context: Intersecting Disadvantages
The Indian case illustrates these dynamics with particular clarity, because here multiple axes of disadvantage intersect and compound one another. Caste remains a powerful determinant of educational opportunity: Dalit and Adivasi children, despite constitutional protection and affirmative action, continue to face structural disadvantage in access and cultural and interactional disadvantage within schools, where they may encounter discrimination, low expectations and a curriculum that does not reflect their experience. Class compounds caste, as the disadvantaged castes are disproportionately poor. Gender adds a further dimension, with girls, particularly in rural and conservative settings, facing barriers to access and continuation. Religion is significant, with some minority communities, notably Muslims, experiencing substantial educational disadvantage. Disability intersects with all of these, and children with disabilities from poor, lower-caste or minority families face compounded exclusion. Language is a further axis, as children whose mother tongue differs from the medium of instruction face a cultural barrier of the kind Bourdieu described.

The concept of intersectionality is essential here: these axes of disadvantage do not simply add together but interact, so that a poor Dalit girl with a disability in a rural area faces a form of exclusion that cannot be understood by considering any single factor in isolation. This has an important implication for inclusive education policy, which often addresses one axis at a time: disability or gender or caste: and may therefore fail those who are disadvantaged on several axes simultaneously. Genuine inclusion in the Indian context requires an intersectional approach that recognises and responds to the compounding of disadvantage.

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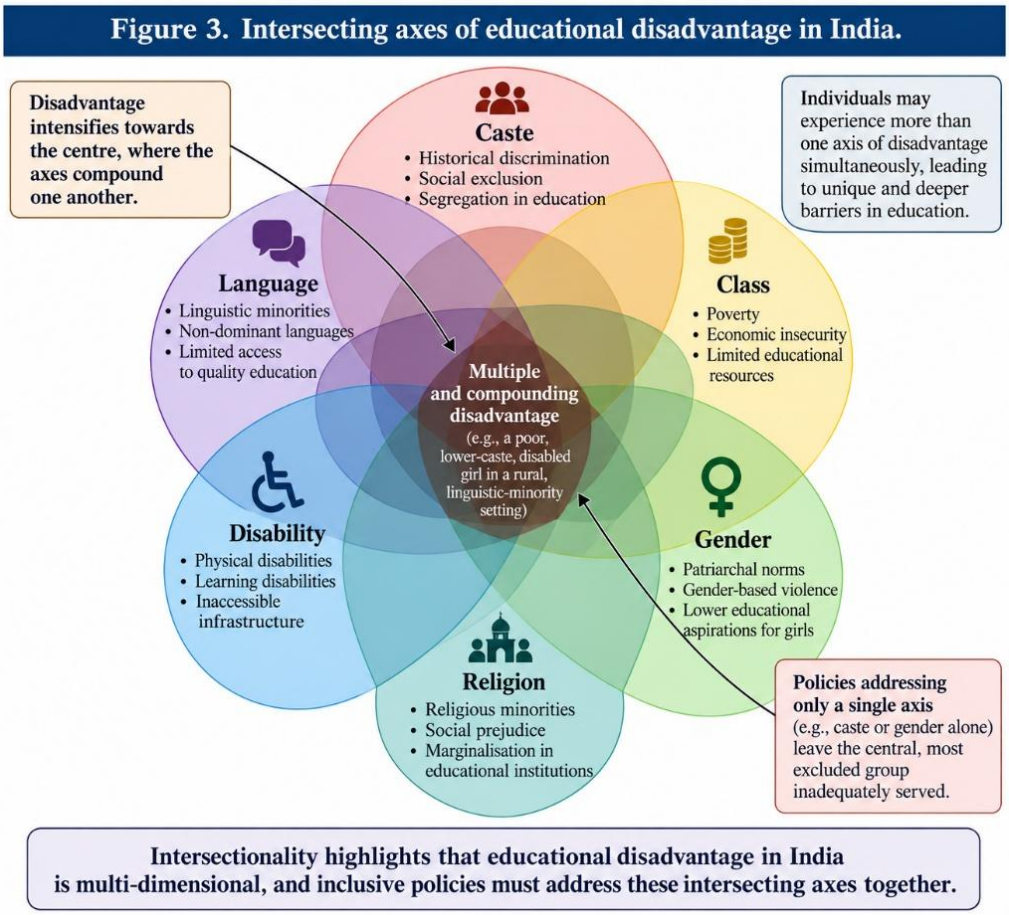


Figure 3. Intersecting axes of educational disadvantage in India.

This figure is a diagram of several overlapping circles, in the manner of a Venn diagram, each representing an axis of disadvantage: caste, class, gender, religion, disability and language. The circles overlap substantially in the centre, and the central region of maximum overlap is highlighted and labelled to represent those who experience disadvantage on multiple axes simultaneously: for example, a poor, lower-caste, disabled girl in a rural, linguistic-minority setting. Annotations around the figure note that disadvantage intensifies toward the centre, where the axes compound one another and that policies addressing only a single circle leave the central, most excluded group inadequately served. The figure makes the concept of intersectionality concrete and underscores why single-axis approaches to inclusion are insufficient.

8.4 Policy Commitments and their Limits

India's education approach aims to bring more children into school. The Constitution treats schooling as a right. It also places duties on the state to support people who have been left behind. In 2009, the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act made basic education something families could claim through courts. It also introduced support meant to improve inclusion. One step was reserved seats for children from disadvantaged groups in private schools. Later, the National Education Policy again stressed the need for fair and inclusive education.

Good signs have followed. More children enroll, and many now sit in classrooms where they were once excluded. But the argument above still matters. Getting a child into school does not always lead to stronger participation or better learning. Policy has focused more on major structural gaps. It has not matched that focus with day to day school practices. It has also tended to treat one type of disadvantage at a time, even when a child faces several at once. The result can be a system where marginalised groups are more visible. Yet inclusion may not feel real. Children may be present in lessons, but learning does not always improve. They may be admitted, but they do not always feel that they belong.

9. DISCUSSION AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

9.1 Inclusion as Necessary but not Sufficient

The main message of this study is that inclusive education counts. Still, it does not do enough by itself to secure social equality. Inclusion matters because stopping disadvantaged children from schooling is one route through which

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inequality continues. It also matters because education has value on its own. It shapes opportunities later in life too. But inclusion alone falls short for two core reasons.

First, access does not automatically mean that children join school life in a real way. It also does not guarantee strong learning outcomes. School culture and everyday interactions can still exclude children in practice. Second, even if schooling becomes fully inclusive, it cannot undo wider inequality formed and sustained outside schools. That inequality shows up later in hiring and work. It is tied to caste, class, and gender arrangements. Education can help society move toward fairness. Yet it cannot replace the broader social change that equality requires. From the conflict view, the point lasts. If we put the task of building a just society mainly on schools, we place too much weight on one institution inside a system that is not equal.

9.2 Toward Transformative Inclusion

This is not a call to give up. It points to a stronger and more usable way to think about inclusion. You could call this transformative inclusion. The idea is to tackle three types of barriers at the same time.

First, structural barriers. These are addressed by removing obstacles and by offering support that is free, funded well, and shared in a fair way. This can also include affirmative action.

Second, cultural barriers. These need to be handled through lesson design and day to day teaching that treat every student's home language, learning style, and daily life as worth respect. The point is to stop acting like the main group's habits are the norm.

Third, interactional barriers. Teachers need coaching and steady help, not one-time tips. They also need support that keeps expectations high for all children. Schools should then shape a setting where learners feel they fit in, not that they are pushed to the side.

This work is intersectional. It looks at how problems can stack up across different kinds of disadvantage. It also keeps a clear view of what schools can manage and what they cannot. Inclusion in schools should connect to a wider goal of fair society. It should not be used as a substitute.

9.3 Implications for Policy and Practice

There are key points for policy makers and for daily school work.

Policy should look beyond enrollment numbers and basic access. It should also follow who joins in during lessons and who reaches expected outcomes. Break the data down by the overlapping areas of disadvantage. That way, exclusion inside systems labeled "inclusive" can be seen and fixed. Teacher education is a major factor. What teachers do in class shapes results. If training is weak, teachers may repeat cultural or interactional barriers. If training is strong, teachers can help loosen those barriers.

Curricula should match students' real lives more closely. They should be culturally responsive and multilingual. This can shrink the gap between school culture and the lived realities of students who face disadvantage. Affirmative action and focused support should be planned with intersectionality in mind. The goal is to ensure that people who face more than one disadvantage are not overlooked. Last, inclusive education cannot work in isolation. School efforts should link with social and economic policies that address poverty and discrimination. Schools should not be left to carry the full load alone.

9.4 LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

This study has limits. It is a theoretical and document based review. It does not add new classroom observations. Instead, it brings ideas together and offers critique. It also relies on the Indian context for its base.

Next steps should add evidence through empirical work. Researchers should study participation and achievement, and they should use intersectional data along with separated breakdowns. They should also examine classroom practices that either block inclusion through culture and interaction, or reduce those blocks. It would also help to judge specific policies and teaching methods that aim at transformative inclusion.

More comparison across different social settings would also help. It could test which parts of the case hold up in general. It could also show which parts depend on specific patterns of inequality.

10. CONCLUSION

This paper examines inclusive schooling and social fairness through sociological lenses. It does not treat school as one straight road where all learners get the same opportunity. It frames education as a social system. That system can keep unequal patterns going. At the same time, it can also shift outcomes. The author uses multiple approaches, such as functionalism, conflict theory, and symbolic interactionism. It also brings in Bourdieu's idea of cultural capital. It further draws on Sen's capability approach. From these sources, the paper argues that "inclusion" is not only about placing students inside schools. Real inclusion is about day to day belonging. It also concerns whether students can do well once they are there.

The paper highlights where the problems show up. Some barriers sit in social structures. Others are tied to culture. Still more appear in everyday interactions between people. When the focus narrows to India, the claims become more detailed. Caste, class, gender, religion, disability, and language are described as linked forces. They do not work in isolation. Together, they influence who gets chances. They also shape what happens to those chances after they are given.

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The paper also notes that inclusion policies have improved access. Even so, it reports gaps that still matter. Participation remains uneven. Achievement also remains uneven. These gaps tend to grow when students face more than one disadvantage at the same time. A central message is that inclusive education is necessary. But it does not automatically create social equality. It can interrupt common routes through which inequality is reproduced. Yet the paper says the gains become clear only when inclusion changes daily life in a meaningful way. That kind of change requires work on cultural barriers and interaction barriers. It is not enough to address only formal structures.

At the same time, the paper argues that education cannot handle justice on its own. Schools may support movement toward equality. Still, fairness depends on how power and life chances are arranged outside school settings. For those in policy, teaching, and research, the goal is twofold. First, make inclusion real in practice, not just in policy language. Second, connect that effort to a broader drive for a more equal society. Only then does the long held idea of education as a great equaliser gain real weight.

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