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## From Policy to Pavement: Assessing Inclusive Education Preparation in Higher Secondary Institutions of Jabalpur City

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**Abstract:** *Inclusive education is a transformative approach aimed at ensuring that all students, regardless of their abilities, socio-economic backgrounds, or disabilities, have equitable access to learning opportunities. It advocates for the dismantling of barriers that hinder learning and participation, ensuring that diversity is not merely acknowledged but actively embraced as a strength within the learning environment. This paper examines the extent to which Higher Secondary Institution in Jabalpur City, both government and private, are prepared for inclusive education. By analyzing infrastructure, policy implementation, faculty training, and student perception, the study highlights gaps between policy frameworks and on-ground realities. The findings are supported by statistical data and graphical representations to offer a comprehensive view of the current scenario.*

### Introduction

Inclusive education has evolved from being a theoretical ideal to a mandatory policy, particularly under India's Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act (RPWD), 2016 and the National Education Policy (NEP), 2020. Jabalpur, a key educational hub in Madhya Pradesh, presents a mix of private and public institutions with varying levels of readiness. This paper seeks to evaluate whether the vision outlined in national policies is being translated effectively into practical implementation. Inclusive education is a progressive educational philosophy and practice that emphasizes the right of every learner—regardless of physical, intellectual, social, emotional, linguistic, or other conditions—to access, participate in, and thrive within mainstream educational settings. It advocates for the dismantling of barriers that hinder learning and participation, ensuring that diversity is not merely acknowledged but actively embraced as a strength within the learning environment.

Far beyond the mere placement of students with disabilities in regular classrooms, inclusive education promotes the transformation of content, teaching methods, structures, and strategies to accommodate a wide spectrum of learner needs. It is rooted in the principles of equity, social justice, and human rights, aligning closely with global mandates such as the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) and India's Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act (RPWD), 2016.

In the present scenario, the significance of inclusive education has become more pronounced than ever. As societies grapple with widening disparities in access to education—amplified by technological

shifts, socio-economic inequalities, and post-pandemic disruptions—the need for an inclusive approach has moved from ethical idealism to practical urgency. Inclusive education is now seen not only as a tool for social integration but also as a strategy for building resilient, compassionate, and future-ready educational ecosystems.

Furthermore, the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 emphasizes inclusive practices as a foundational pillar of educational reform in India. It calls for learner-centric pedagogy, universal design for learning (UDL), and systemic support to ensure that no child is left behind. In this light, inclusive education emerges as both a moral imperative and a pragmatic response to the evolving educational landscape—one that champions diversity, promotes equal opportunity, and lays the groundwork for a more just and humane society.

### **Objectives of Inclusive Education**

In today's dynamic and complex world, the relevance of inclusive education is more urgent than ever. Educational institutions are increasingly expected to serve as agents of social cohesion in contexts marked by economic disparity, cultural pluralism, and rising mental health concerns. Inclusive education plays a pivotal role in achieving this objective by:

- **Promoting Equity and Social Justice**

Inclusive education ensures that students from marginalized groups—including those with disabilities, from tribal communities, linguistic minorities, and economically disadvantaged backgrounds—receive equal opportunities to learn and grow. It aligns with **Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4)**, which seeks to "ensure inclusive and equitable quality education for all" by 2030.

- **Reducing Stigma and Discrimination**

Inclusion fosters peer interaction and collaborative learning, which help dismantle stereotypes. For instance, a study conducted by NCERT (2021) observed that schools practicing inclusive pedagogy saw a marked reduction in bullying and increased peer empathy among students.

- **Preparing Students for a Diverse Society**

In inclusive classrooms, students learn to respect and adapt to differences—skills that are essential for thriving in a multicultural, globalized world. This fosters emotional intelligence, leadership, and democratic values from an early age.

- **Improving Learning Outcomes**

Contrary to misconceptions, inclusive education benefits all learners. Research from the **World Bank (2020)** shows that inclusive teaching strategies—like cooperative learning, differentiated instruction, and Universal Design for Learning (UDL)—enhance engagement and outcomes for both children with and without disabilities.

- **Responding to Post-Pandemic Challenges**

The COVID-19 pandemic exposed and deepened educational inequalities. Children with disabilities and those from remote areas were disproportionately affected by the digital divide. Inclusive education, through blended learning models and context-responsive strategies, offers a framework to rebuild more resilient and equitable education systems.

### **Government Policies Promoting Inclusive Education in India**

Inclusive education in India has evolved through a series of progressive legal frameworks, national policies, and centrally sponsored schemes that aim to ensure equitable access to quality education for all learners, including children with disabilities, socially disadvantaged groups, and those with diverse learning needs. The Government of India, through various ministries and agencies, has laid down a multi-pronged policy approach to institutionalize inclusive education across the country.

- **The Rights of Persons with Disabilities (RPWD) Act, 2016**

The RPWD Act is a landmark legislation that replaced the Persons with Disabilities Act, 1995. It expands the definition of disability from 7 to 21 categories and explicitly guarantees the right to inclusive education at all levels.

Key Provisions of the act is:

Barrier-free access in all educational institutions. Reservation of seats in higher education (minimum 5% for persons with benchmark disabilities). Mandatory reasonable accommodation and individualized support. Appointment of special educators and availability of assistive technology.

- **National Education Policy (NEP), 2020:** The NEP 2020 reaffirms the government's commitment to equity and inclusion as foundational principles.

Inclusive Features of the policy is:

Development of inclusive curricula and pedagogy tailored to the needs of diverse learners. Establishment of gender-inclusion funds and targeted interventions for socio-economically disadvantaged groups (SEDGs). Emphasis on teacher sensitization, universal design for learning (UDL), and integration of children with disabilities in mainstream schools. Encouragement of school complexes to share inclusive infrastructure and resources.
- **Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan (Integrated Scheme for School Education):** Launched in 2018, this umbrella scheme integrates three previous programs: Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA), Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan (RMSA), and Teacher Education.

Inclusive Components of the Abhiyan is:

Allocation of funds for inclusive classrooms, assistive devices, and transport allowance for Children with Special Needs (CWSN). Provision of resource rooms, special educators, and therapeutic services. Maintenance of Individualized Education Plans (IEPs). Regular sensitization programs for teachers, school heads, and community stakeholders.
- **National Trust Act, 1999 & Its Schemes:** Addresses the rights of persons with intellectual and developmental disabilities (ID/DD).

Education-Related Schemes includes:

Samarth: Residential support including education for persons with severe disabilities. Gyan Prabha: Scholarships for higher education and vocational training. DISHA Centres: Early intervention and inclusive pre-school education.
- **Accessible India Campaign (Sugamya Bharat Abhiyan):** While not education-specific, this initiative by the Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities aims to make public buildings, including schools and universities, accessible. Relevance of the campaign Focus on creating barrier-free educational infrastructure (classrooms, libraries, washrooms). Promotes the adoption of accessible digital content and learning platforms.
- **National Curriculum Framework for School Education (NCF 2023):** Emphasizes inclusive values, flexible learning, and multilingual and multimodal instruction to meet varied student needs.

**Guidance by the NCF**

Encourages competency-based learning with differentiated instruction for learners with different abilities. Calls for the integration of inclusive practices into pre-service teacher education.
- **Reservation and Support Schemes**

Educational Reservations includes Scholarships and fee concessions for children with disabilities. Support Programs includes Post-Matric and Pre-Matric Scholarships for disabled students. Skill development and inclusive vocational education programs under the Department of Social Justice & Empowerment.

Use of Technology in Inclusive Classrooms includes DIKSHA platform hosts digital content with accessibility features and Special e-content developed for children with visual, hearing, and cognitive impairments.

Inclusive Education of the Disabled at Secondary Stage (IEDSS) aimed at students with disabilities in classes IX–XII. Provide Support services like Reader/writer allowance during exams; Stipend of ₹600 per month; Assistive devices and transport allowances.

Inclusive education has emerged as a cornerstone of equitable and quality education worldwide, prompting a substantial body of literature exploring its policies, implementation gaps, teacher readiness, and infrastructural preparedness. This review synthesizes key national and regional studies relevant to the Indian context, with a specific focus on implications for higher secondary institutions in semi-urban cities like Jabalpur.

## Review of Literature

### Policy Framework and Legal Mandates

**UNESCO (1994)** in the Salamanca Statement emphasized that schools must accommodate all children, regardless of their physical, intellectual, social, emotional, linguistic, or other conditions. This foundational document laid the groundwork for inclusive education globally.

**The Rights of Persons with Disabilities (RPWD) Act, 2016**, marked a legislative shift in India by mandating inclusive education at all levels. The act emphasized equal opportunities, barrier-free infrastructure, and reasonable accommodations, but studies (Rao & Reddy, 2018) have found that awareness and enforcement remain inconsistent across states and institutions.

**The National Education Policy (NEP), 2020** reinforced the vision of an inclusive system by calling for Universal Design for Learning (UDL), teacher sensitization, and equity-focused reforms. However, **Chakraborty (2021)** notes that the translation of these ideals into practice remains sporadic due to systemic inertia and underfunding.

### Teacher Preparedness and Institutional Readiness

**Kumar & Dey (2019)** conducted a study across Madhya Pradesh, revealing that only 32% of teachers in higher secondary schools had undergone any formal training in inclusive education. This gap was wider in private unaided institutions.

In a study by **IGNOU's Centre for Disability Studies (2020)** focused on urban districts including Jabalpur, it was found that although government schools often had better policy awareness, private institutions lacked both the willingness and resources to support inclusive classrooms. Teachers cited a lack of support, overburdening, and inadequate instructional materials.

**Sharma & Das (2017)** also concluded that teacher attitudes toward inclusion are often sympathetic, but not necessarily accompanied by pedagogical competence or institutional support. Training programs tend to be short-term and theoretical, failing to equip teachers for real-life classroom challenges.

### Infrastructure and Assistive Technologies

A study by **NCERT (2021)** found that only 43% of secondary and senior secondary schools across India had barrier-free access, and in many semi-urban schools, such as those in Jabalpur, facilities like ramps, tactile signage, and accessible restrooms were either poorly maintained or entirely absent.

**World Bank (2020)** emphasized that without investments in assistive technology and learning materials tailored for students with disabilities, inclusion efforts remain symbolic. This aligns with field observations in Jabalpur where devices such as Braille readers, screen magnifiers, or text-to-speech software were rarely available.

### Student Experiences and Perceptions

**Mitra & Banerjee (2019)** studied the perceptions of students with disabilities in higher secondary institutions. They found that students often felt excluded not only due to physical barriers but also because of social isolation and lack of peer sensitization programs. Their findings resonate with the regional context of Jabalpur, where anecdotal evidence points to stigma and lack of inclusive student engagement.

**Deshmukh (2022)**, in a qualitative study in Madhya Pradesh, emphasized that inclusion cannot be achieved without creating emotional safety and a sense of belonging. Students with disabilities reported feeling like outsiders due to unadapted curricula, exam-related stress, and lack of personalized attention.

### Implementation Challenges and Policy-Practice Gap

**TISS (2018)** found that although policy documents were comprehensive, implementation was hindered by poor inter-departmental coordination, lack of trained human resources, and the absence of accountability frameworks.

In a Jabalpur-based study conducted by a local NGO, **Prayas (2021)**, it was noted that private institutions often "managed" inclusion through informal adjustments rather than systemic changes. For example, instead of adapting the curriculum, they provided extra time or partial assessment relief, which failed to meet the true spirit of inclusion.

### Regional Studies and Case Evidence (Jabalpur Focus)

While large-scale studies provide a national perspective, localized studies are crucial to understanding ground-level realities in districts like Jabalpur. According to **District Education Office Records (2022)**, out of 65 surveyed higher secondary schools:

- Only 26% had at least one trained inclusive education teacher.
- Less than 15% had implemented Individualized Education Plans (IEPs).
- Only 3 schools had ICT labs equipped with assistive software.

These statistics underscore a clear discrepancy between national mandates and local implementation in Jabalpur's higher secondary institutions.

### Objectives of the Study

- To assess the infrastructural preparedness of Higher Secondary Institution in Jabalpur for inclusive education.
- To evaluate faculty awareness and training in inclusive practices.
- To understand the perceptions of normal students regarding inclusivity.
- To identify challenges and propose actionable recommendations.

### Methodology

The methodology followed in the present studies includes:

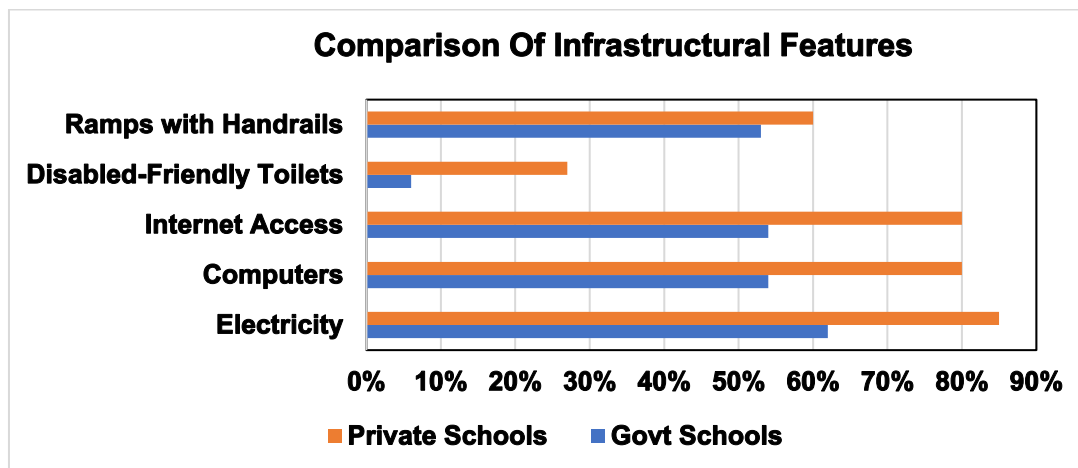
- **Sample:** 10 Higher Secondary Institutions (5 government, 5 private colleges) in Jabalpur.
- **Tools:** Structured questionnaires, Institutional audits, and Interviews.
- **Respondents:** 150 students (class IX, X, XI & XII), 50 faculty members, 10 administrators.
- **Data Analysis:** Descriptive statistics and thematic content analysis.

### Findings & Conclusions

#### Infrastructural Features

**Table 1: Showing Comparison of Govt. & Private Schools w.r.t. Infrastructural Features Required for Inclusive Education**

Infrastructure Feature	Govt Schools	Private Schools
Electricity	62%	85%
Computers	54%	80%
Internet Access	54%	80%
Disabled-Friendly Toilets	6%	27%
Ramps with Handrails	53%	~60%



**Graph 1: Showing comparison of govt. & private schools w.r.t. Infrastructural features required for Inclusive Education**

### Discussion on Findings

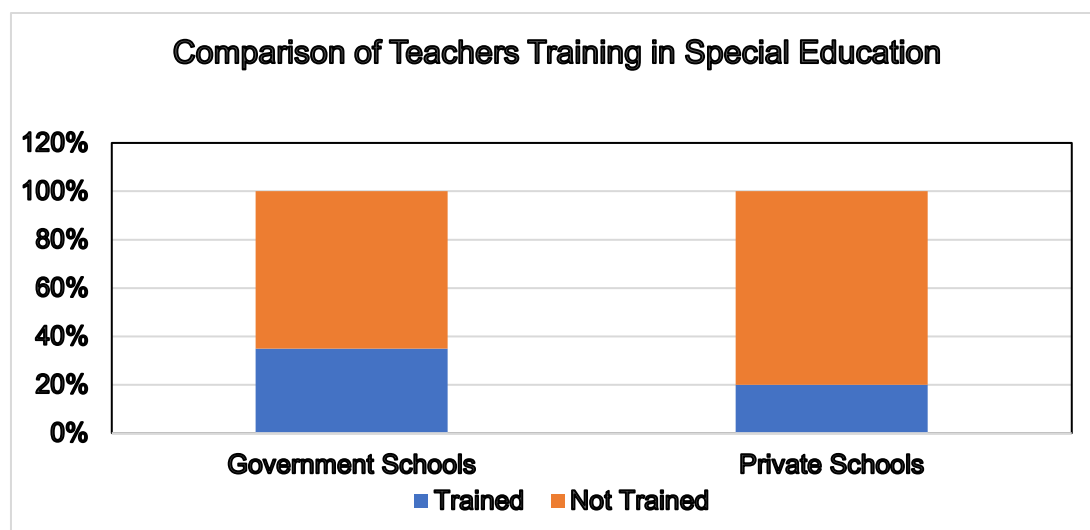
- Private schools outperform government schools in most modern infrastructure elements (electricity, computers, internet access), indicating better funding and operational facilities.
- Ramps with handrails show relatively comparable availability, suggesting some compliance with inclusive infrastructure norms in both types of institutions.
- A concerning gap is visible in disabled-friendly toilets, especially in government schools, which could severely limit accessibility for students with physical disabilities.
- Despite private schools having better general infrastructure, both sectors fall short on dedicated inclusive facilities (e.g., accessible toilets).
- Government schools may benefit from government schemes for physical infrastructure (like ramps), but lag behind in maintaining digital readiness.
- For true inclusion, basic and assistive infrastructure must be prioritized equally in both school types.

### Teachers' Preparedness

- **Percentage of Teachers attended Training in Special Education**

**Table 2: Showing comparison of govt. & private schools w.r.t. Teachers' Training in Special Education**

Category	Government Schools	Private Schools
Trained	35%	20%
Not Trained	65%	80%

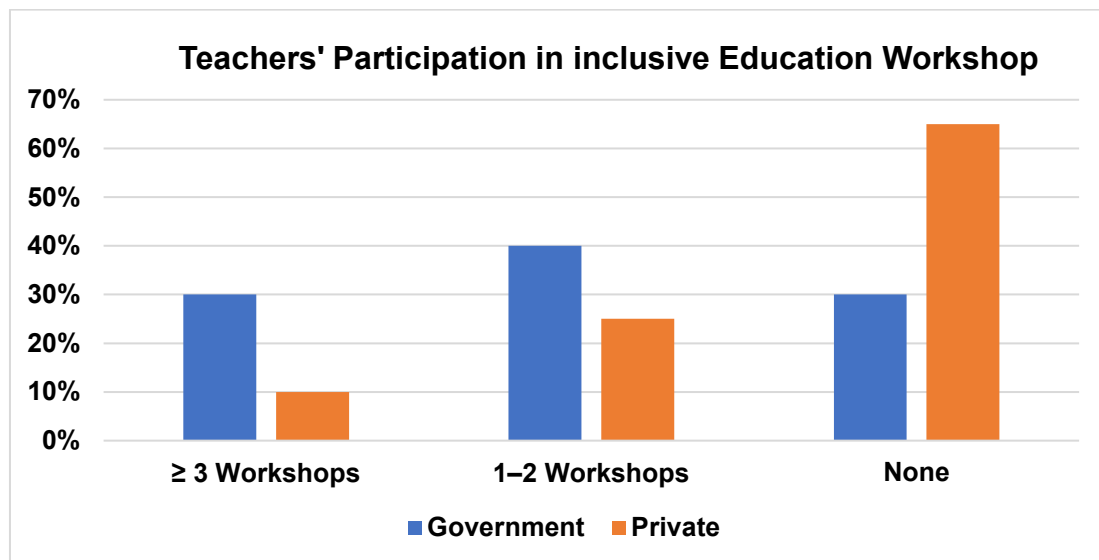


**Graph 2: Showing comparison of govt. & private schools w.r.t. Teachers' Training in Special Education**

- **Participation in Inclusive Education Workshops (Last 3 Years)**

**Table 3: Showing comparison of govt. & private schools w.r.t. Teachers' participation in Inclusive Education Workshop**

Category	Government	Private
≥ 3 Workshops	30%	10%
1–2 Workshops	40%	25%
None	30%	65%

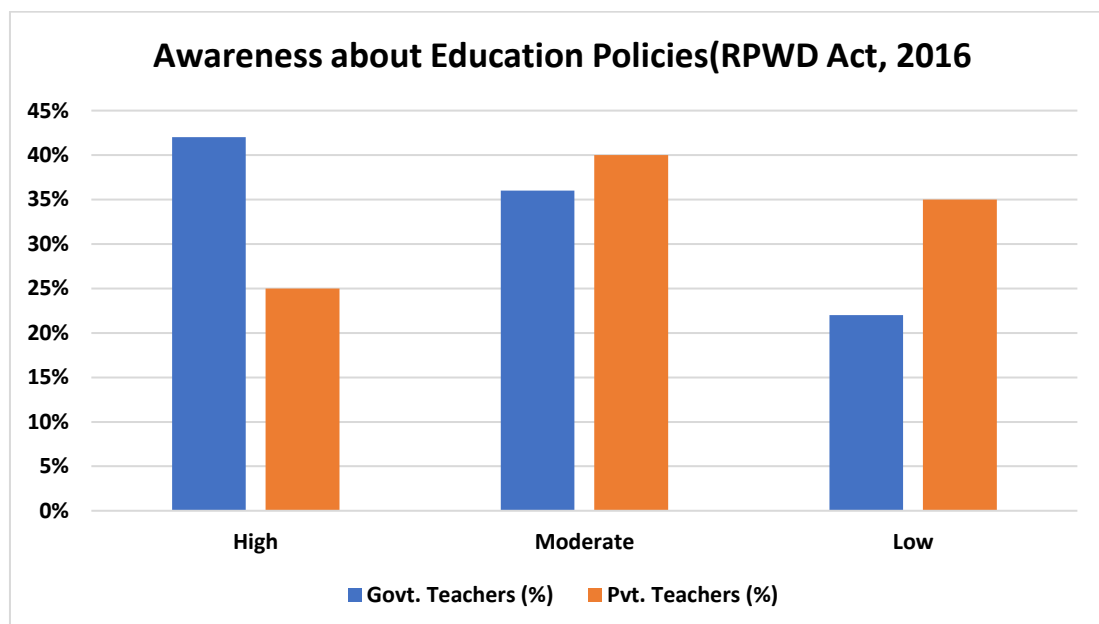


Graph 3: Showing comparison of govt. & private schools w.r.t. Teachers' participation in Inclusive Education Workshop

- Awareness of Inclusive Education Policies (RPWD Act, 2016)**

Table 4: Showing comparison of govt. & private schools w.r.t. Teachers' Awareness of Inclusive Education Policies (RPWD Act, 2016)

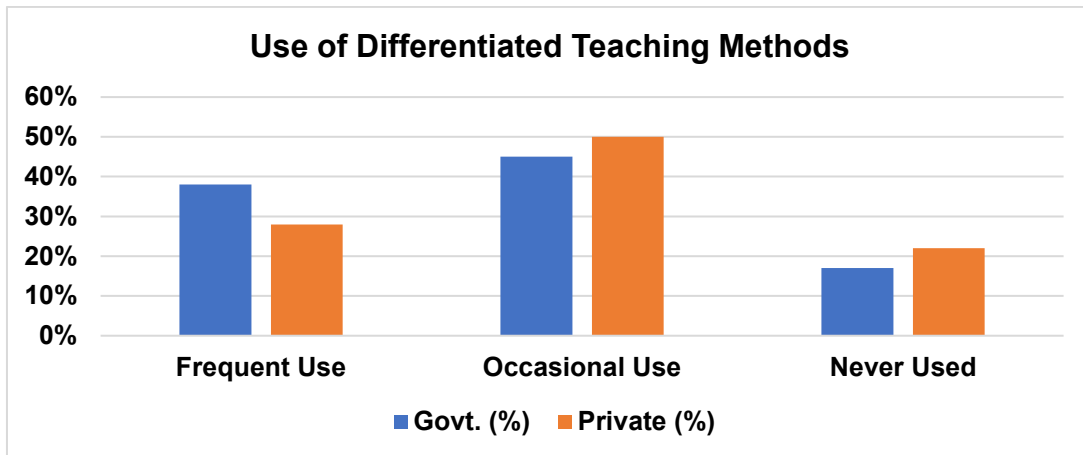
Awareness Level	Govt. Teachers (%)	Pvt. Teachers (%)
High	42%	25%
Moderate	36%	40%
Low	22%	35%



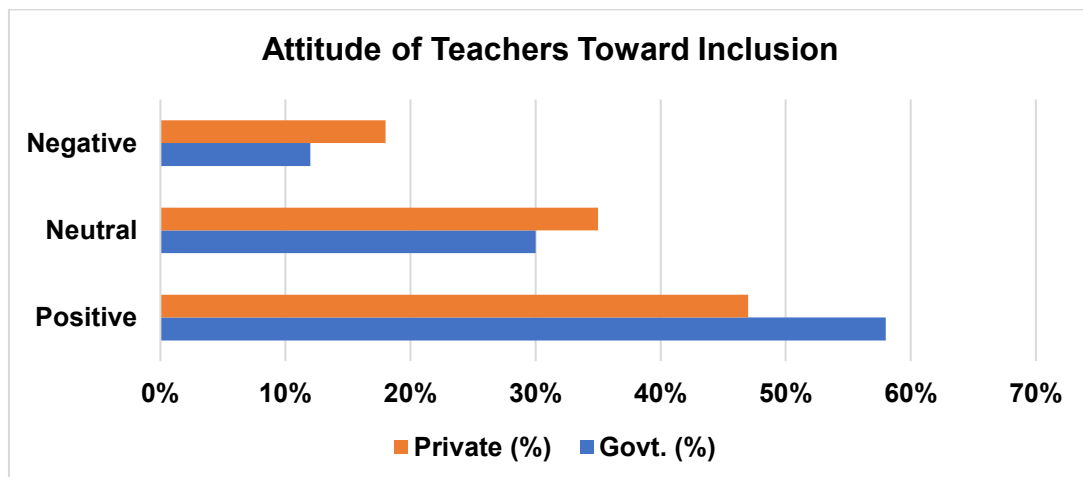
Graph 4: Showing comparison of govt. & private schools w.r.t. Teachers' Awareness of Inclusive Education Policies (RPWD Act, 2016)

**Use of Differentiated Teaching Methods****Table 5: Showing comparison of govt. & private schools w.r.t. Use of differentiated teaching methods by the teachers**

Usage Level	Govt. (%)	Private (%)
Frequent Use	38%	28%
Occasional Use	45%	50%
Never Used	17%	22%

**Graph 5: Showing comparison of govt. & private schools w.r.t. Use of differentiated teaching methods by the teachers****Attitude Toward Inclusion (Scale: Positive, Neutral, Negative)****Table 6: Showing comparison of govt. & private schools w.r.t Attitude of Teachers Toward Inclusion**

Attitude	Govt. (%)	Private (%)
Positive	58%	47%
Neutral	30%	35%
Negative	12%	18%

**Graph 6: Showing comparison of govt. & private schools w.r.t Attitude of Teachers toward Inclusion**



### Discussion on Findings

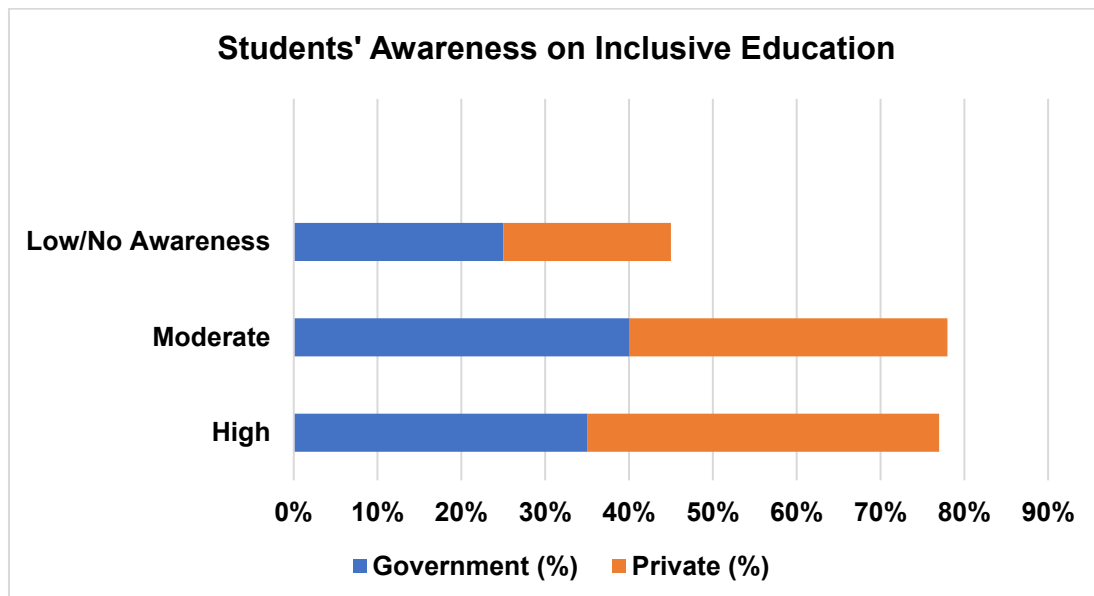
- Government teachers are more likely to have undergone formal training and participated in government-sponsored workshops.
- Private school teachers, despite being motivated, often lack institutional support for inclusive education.
- Awareness about the RPWD Act is low to moderate in both sectors, though slightly higher among government faculty.
- Differentiated instruction is more common in government schools, possibly due to mandated practices.
- Private school teachers showed more neutral or negative attitudes, likely due to inadequate support structures.

### Students Perspective towards Inclusive Education

- **Awareness of Inclusive Education**

**Table 7: Showing comparison of govt. & private schools w.r.t Students' awareness on Inclusive Education**

Awareness Level	Government (%)	Private (%)
High	35%	42%
Moderate	40%	38%
Low/No Awareness	25%	20%

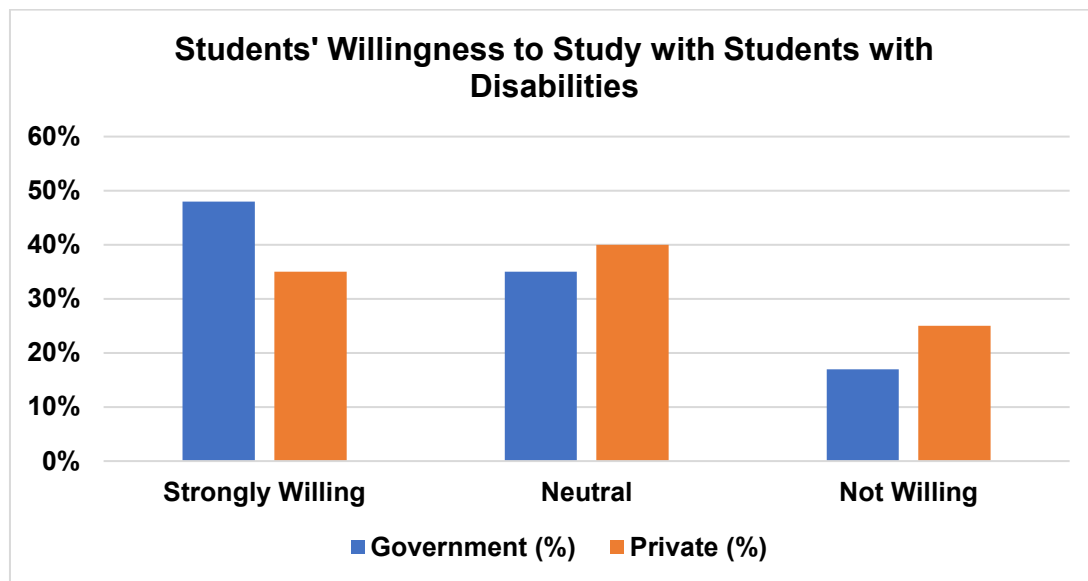


**Graph 7: Showing comparison of govt. & private schools w.r.t Students' awareness on Inclusive Education**

- **Willingness to Study with Students with Disabilities**

**Table 8: Showing comparison of govt. & private schools w.r.t Students' Willingness to Study with Students with Disabilities**

Response	Government (%)	Private (%)
Strongly Willing	48%	35%
Neutral	35%	40%
Not Willing	17%	25%

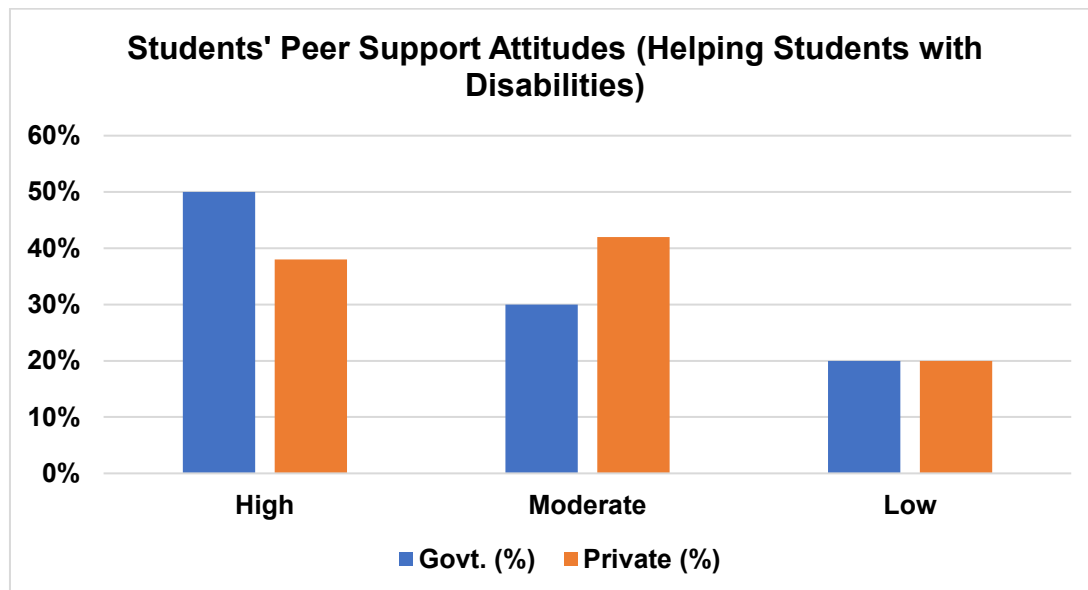


Graph 8: Showing comparison of govt. & private schools w.r.t Students' Willingness to Study with Students with Disabilities

- **Peer Support Attitudes (Helping Students with Disabilities)**

Table 9: Showing comparison of govt. & private schools w.r.t Students' Peer Support Attitudes (Helping Students with Disabilities)

Peer Support Level	Govt. (%)	Private (%)
High	50%	38%
Moderate	30%	42%
Low	20%	20%

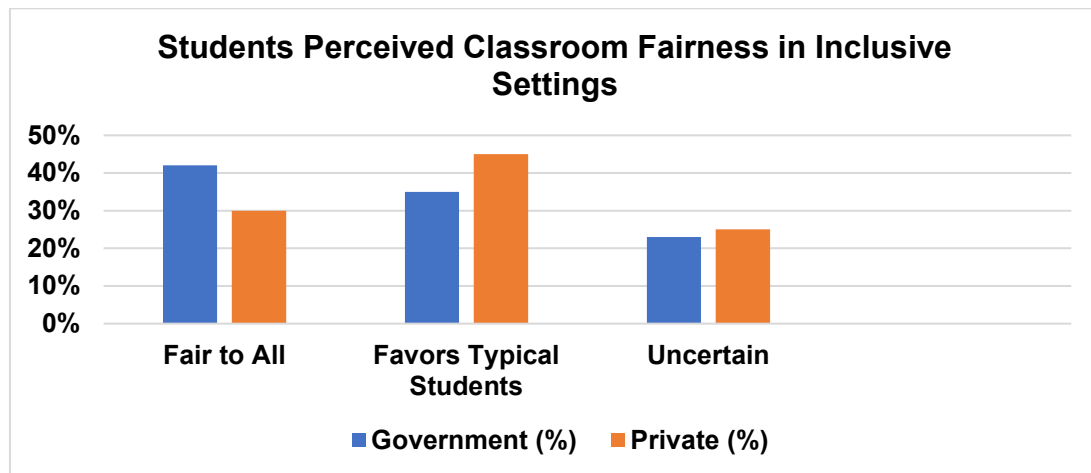


Graph 9: Showing comparison of govt. & private schools w.r.t Students' Peer Support Attitudes (Helping Students with Disabilities)

- Perceived Classroom Fairness in Inclusive Settings

**Table 10: Showing comparison of govt. & private schools w.r.t Students' Perceived Classroom Fairness in Inclusive Settings**

Perception of Fairness	Government (%)	Private (%)
Fair to All	42%	30%
Favors Typical Students	35%	45%
Uncertain	23%	25%

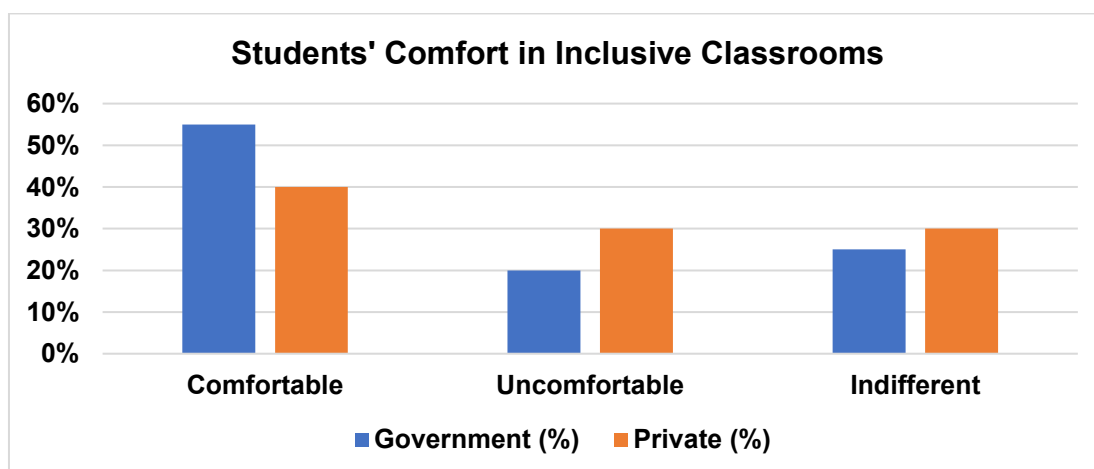


**Graph 10: Showing comparison of govt. & private schools w.r.t Students' Perceived Classroom Fairness in Inclusive Settings**

- Comfort in Inclusive Classrooms

**Table 11: Showing comparison of govt. & private schools w.r.t Students' Comfort in Inclusive Classrooms**

Comfort Level	Government (%)	Private (%)
Comfortable	55%	40%
Uncomfortable	20%	30%
Indifferent	25%	30%



**Graph 11: Showing comparison of govt. & private schools w.r.t Students' Comfort in Inclusive Classrooms**

### Discussions on Findings

- Private school students showed higher awareness of inclusive education, likely due to greater access to digital resources and academic exposure.
- Government school students demonstrated higher empathy and willingness to support peers with disabilities.
- Private school students were more likely to perceive inclusive classrooms as biased toward typical learners.
- Students from both sectors emphasized the need for teacher intervention and peer sensitization programs.

### Student Voices on Inclusive settings

"I would help my classmate in a wheelchair, but I am scared as they are too sensitive and emotional" – Govt. School Student

"Initially the acceptance was difficult but now gradually adjusting with the inclusive settings." – Govt. School Student

"Sometimes it's hard when teachers go slow because of one student. But I also think everyone deserves to learn." – Private School Student

### Conclusion

The study reveals a **deep and persistent gap between inclusive education policies and their practical execution**, especially at the higher secondary level. While frameworks like NEP 2020 and RPWD Act provide robust foundations, the lack of teacher training, poor infrastructure, minimal assistive technologies, and weak institutional accountability continue to undermine inclusive practices. For cities like Jabalpur, the challenge lies in translating progressive policies into sustained, locally adapted, and well-resourced action plans that genuinely support every learner.

### Comparative Analysis: Gaps Between Policy Frameworks and On-Ground Realities in Government and Private Schools of Jabalpur (Inclusive Education)

#### Policy Overview

Policy Mandate	Expected Implementation in Schools
<b>Right to Education (RTE) Act, 2009</b>	Free and compulsory education for all, including children with disabilities.
<b>RPWD Act, 2016</b>	Barrier-free infrastructure, trained teachers, inclusive curricula.
<b>NEP 2020</b>	Emphasizes equity, flexibility, teacher sensitization, and use of assistive technologies.
<b>Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) / Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan</b>	Special educators, inclusive classrooms, aids/appliances, and Individualized Education Plans (IEPs).

#### Key Dimensions for Comparison

Dimension	Government Schools (Jabalpur)	Private Schools (Jabalpur)
Infrastructure Accessibility	Partial implementation; ramps exist in ~60% but rarely follow universal design norms.	Limited or cosmetic compliance; only elite schools provide accessible classrooms/toilets.
Teacher Training	Teachers often receive one-time training under SSA; depth is insufficient.	Training is less common unless affiliated with progressive chains; awareness is low.
Assistive Devices & Resources	Some support through government schemes, but irregular supply and limited maintenance.	Usually absent unless a child comes with personal devices; no institutional provision.
Student Identification & IEPs	Government conducts surveys, but lacks follow-up; IEPs not maintained in most cases.	Private schools often avoid formal identification to bypass legal obligations.

Peer Sensitization & Inclusion	Awareness campaigns held occasionally; inclusion is functional but not always meaningful.	Peer engagement is voluntary; inclusion seen as charity rather than a right.
Administrative Monitoring	Block Education Officers and District Education Officers conduct audits, but reporting is inconsistent.	Minimal oversight; private schools not held accountable unless publicly funded or aided.
Attitude Toward Inclusion	Teachers often supportive but lack strategies and resources.	Mixed attitudes; seen as burden unless supported by fees or special arrangements.

## Recommendations

### For Government & Administrators

- Mandatory inclusive infrastructure audits for both school types.
- Government should extend funding and capacity-building to improve disabled-accessible toilets and ICT tools in its schools.
- Private schools, despite better tech readiness, must be mandated to ensure core accessibility features.
- Policy enforcement under the RPWD Act, 2016, should include penalties for non-compliance.
- Mandatory inclusive education modules in all teacher training institutions.
- Regular refresher workshops for both government and private faculty.
- Development of resource centres for inclusive pedagogy.
- Inclusion of incentives for private schools to invest in inclusive practices.
- Enhanced monitoring and accountability systems under District Education Authorities.

### For Teachers

- Attend courses on special education to understand the needs of special children better.
- Make lesson plan to accommodate both normal and special children in your class.
- Try to communicate with the parents of special children to know them better.
- Plan classroom activity in a way so that no one in the classroom feels neglected.

### For Students

- Peer sensitization workshops in both government and private schools.
- Student inclusion committees to foster leadership and empathy.
- Encourage student-led awareness programs using creative media (posters, skits, videos).
- Integrate inclusive education stories/case studies in the curriculum.
- Teach students to make adjustment with each other so that a healthy environment can be created for learning.

### For Parents

- Attend Parent-Teacher Meetings (PTMs) regularly to stay informed.
- Share your child's strengths, needs, and learning styles.
- Offer feedback and collaborate on Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) if your child has special needs.
- Encourage empathy, kindness, and respect for diversity.
- Demand teacher training and awareness programs on inclusive practices.
- Encourage Independence in Children with Special Needs.
- Educate Yourself About all aspects of Inclusive Education

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