



EMERGING TRENDS IN DISABILITY INCLUSION IN INDIA: A CRITICAL REVIEW OF GOVERNMENT POLICY MEASURES THROUGH CASE STUDIES OF STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES IN JAMMU

Monica Bougal¹, Neelam Choudhary²

¹Department of Economics, University of Jammu, Jammu, India

²Centre for Distance and Online Education, University of Jammu

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ABSTRACT

Disability inclusion is a key priority in India's educational and social policy agenda, driven by the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (RPwD) Act, 2016, the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, the Accessible India Campaign (Sugamya Bharat Abhiyan), and India's commitments to the UNCRPD and SDGs. Although these initiatives have strengthened the framework for inclusive education, implementation remains challenging. This paper reviews trends in disability inclusion in India through government policy measures and case studies of students with locomotor, hearing, and visual impairments in higher education institutions in Jammu. Using a qualitative case study approach, it synthesizes policy developments with students' lived experiences to assess current inclusion practices. Findings show that, despite progressive reforms, students still face inaccessible infrastructure, limited assistive technologies, inadequate learning materials, lack of sign language interpretation, poor digital accessibility, and delays in disability-related support. The experiences of visually impaired students highlight the need for accessible digital content, Braille resources, screen-reader-compatible platforms, and timely accommodations. The review notes a shift from a welfare-based model to a rights-based inclusive framework, but persistent gaps remain between policy and institutional implementation. It calls for monitoring, audits, disability support centres, faculty sensitization, investment in assistive technologies, and participation in governance.

KEYWORDS: Disability inclusion, Higher education, Students with disabilities, Locomotor disability, Hearing impairment, Visual impairment, Government policy, RPwD Act, NEP 2020, policy gaps.

1. INTRODUCTION

Over the past 20 years, understanding of disability has changed from a medical problem needing treatment or charity to one arising from personal impairments and societal barriers. This shift brought disability rights into policy and development. A step was the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in 2006, which treated disability as a human rights issue and asked countries to ensure access to education, jobs, healthcare, transport, and services. The UN's Sustainable Development Goals also stressed "Leaving No One Behind," including persons with disabilities in development plans. In India, this shift appeared in the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016. The RPwD Act expanded recognized disabilities from 7 to 21 and provided reasonable accommodation, accessible education, reservations, and non-discrimination. The government supported this through the Accessible India Campaign, UDID cards, and the National Education Policy 2020. Despite these policies, implementation remains challenging, especially in Jammu and Kashmir, where research is limited and student experiences are rarely documented. This study explores disability inclusion in education institutions in Jammu through interviews with students with disabilities on policy implementation, challenges, and solutions.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Disability discourse shifted from a medical to a social perspective. Oliver (1990) described the medical model, where disability was treated as a problem, but scholars argued that it results from interaction between impairment and social barriers. The rights-based approach gained prominence after the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006). The CRPD emphasized equality, dignity, and accessibility, positioning disability as a rights issue rather than a welfare concern. In India, studies examined inclusion. Sharma and Bharti (2023) interviewed 19 students with disabilities in two Delhi universities and reported challenges in accessibility, assistive technology, and institutional support. Singh and Yashpal (2012) noted that students with disabilities perform to peers when support is provided, yet Kaur (2025) said barriers persist. Morina (2015) stated that students with visual impairment face difficulties in inaccessible environments, and Shaw (2021) reported higher dropout rates, indicating support. In India, Amin et al. (2022) identified five major challenges: financial constraints, social stigma, accessibility issues, low acceptance, and learning difficulties. Tiwari et al. (2025) observed that faculty often lack training to support visually impaired students,



especially in examinations. Teacher attitudes are pivotal to the effective execution of inclusive education, shaping classroom dynamics and inclusion success. Similarly, a study at the University of Limpopo in South Africa found that insufficient infrastructure, inaccessible facilities, negative attitudes from peers and faculty, and limited accessibility hindered learning for students with physical disabilities (Nel et al. 2015). Despite efforts to advance inclusion in higher education, integrating students with disabilities remains challenging, limiting meaningful participation (Morina 2015). Students with visual impairments, in particular, face academic, social, and institutional hurdles and have higher dropout rates, highlighting the need for enhanced institutional support and inclusive learning environments (Shaw 2021). In the Indian context, five challenges affecting students with visual impairments have been identified: financial constraints, societal stigma, accessibility issues, limited peer acceptance, and learning difficulties (Amin et al. 2021). Teacher preparedness is inadequate, as many higher education faculty lack requisite skills to support them, especially during examinations, where anxiety and scribe quality affect performance (Tiwari et al. 2022).

3. RESEARCH GAP

Despite progressive initiatives introduced in India like the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (RPwD) Act 2016, the National Education Policy (NEP) of 2020, the Accessible India Campaign (Sugamya Bharat Abhiyan) campaign, and the Unique Disability Identity (UDID) program, most studies focus on legislative aspects and national-level evaluations of disability inclusion rather than how these policies shape the experiences of persons with disabilities at higher education institutions. There are fewer studies on how students from represented areas like Jammu in India benefit from these policies and deal with different disabilities in education, as most studies focus on one disability type or accessibility issues. Existing research often fails to connect stated policy goals with practical access to education, learning materials, help, and borrowed materials. This paper examines policies and case studies of students with disabilities from Jammu to address these gaps and present evidence on effectiveness and challenges.

4. METHODOLOGY

A qualitative review-cum-case study approach is adopted in this paper. It integrates a critical review of disability policies, government reports, and recent scholarly literature with qualitative evidence from interviews with students with

disabilities in higher education institutions in Jammu. The review is guided by key legislative and institutional frameworks, including the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016, the National Education Policy 2020, the Accessible India Campaign, the UDID Project, and related initiatives, supplemented by peer-reviewed research on disability inclusion in education and public policy. Semi-structured interviews with students with locomotor, visual, and hearing impairments were analyzed thematically to identify patterns in accessibility, learning support, communication barriers, institutional practices, and policy implementation, highlighting gaps between legislative intent and institutional realities in practice.

5. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The present study seeks to:

- To examine the emerging trends in disability inclusion in India.
- To conduct analysis of lived experiences of students with disabilities in Jammu critically review major government policy measures promoting disability inclusion, particularly in higher education.
- To identify the discrepancies between policy provisions and institutional practices and recommendations for strengthening disability inclusion in Indian higher education institutions.

6. EMERGING TRENDS IN DISABILITY INCLUSION IN INDIA

Disability inclusion in India has evolved from a welfare-oriented approach to a rights-based and inclusive development framework. Over the past three decades, policy reforms have increasingly emphasized equality, accessibility, participation, and non-discrimination across education, employment, healthcare, and public services. Landmark developments such as the ratification of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD), enactment of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (RPwD) Act, 2016, implementation of the Accessible India Campaign (Sugamya Bharat Abhiyan), adoption of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, and promotion of digital accessibility through the Unique Disability Identity (UDID) initiative have strengthened the country's commitment to disability inclusion. More recently, the focus has shifted toward universal design, assistive technology, inclusive skill development, digital accessibility, and alignment with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), reflecting the principle of "Leaving No One Behind."

**Table 1. shows time line of disability inclusion initiated from time to time by government**

Year	Milestone	Significance
1992	Rehabilitation Council of India (RCI) Act	Standardized training and professional regulation in rehabilitation services.
1995	Persons with Disabilities (Equal Opportunities, Protection of Rights and Full Participation) Act	India's first comprehensive disability legislation promoting equal opportunities.
2006	UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) adopted	Established a global rights-based framework for disability inclusion.
2007	India ratified the UNCRPD	Committed to harmonizing national laws with international disability rights standards.
2015	Accessible India Campaign (Sugamya Bharat Abhiyan)	Focused on improving accessibility in public buildings, transportation, and ICT.
2016	Rights of Persons with Disabilities (RPwD) Act	Expanded recognized disabilities from 7 to 21 and strengthened rights to education, employment, accessibility, and reasonable accommodation.
2016	Unique Disability Identity (UDID) Project	Introduced a nationwide digital disability identity card and centralized database.
2020	National Education Policy (NEP) 2020	Reinforced inclusive and equitable education, assistive technology, and universal access for learners with disabilities.
2021–Present	Digital Accessibility and Assistive Technology Initiatives	Increased emphasis on accessible e-governance, digital learning platforms, AI-based assistive technologies, and inclusive digital services.
2030 (Vision)	Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)	Promotes disability-inclusive development through the commitment to "Leave No One Behind," particularly in education (SDG 4), employment (SDG 8), reduced inequalities (SDG 10), and inclusive institutions (SDG 16).

7. CASE STUDIES FROM JAMMU: POLICY GAPS

To examine how disability inclusion policies work in practice, this section presents case studies of students with locomotor, hearing, and visual impairments in education institutions in Jammu. Although the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (RPwD) Act, 2016, the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, the Accessible India Campaign, and the Unique Disability Identity (UDID) project have strengthened inclusive education policy, students' experiences reveal uneven implementation. Case studies highlight physical, digital, and social challenges, alongside resilience and support. Inclusion requires safeguards, institutional commitment, accessible infrastructure, pedagogy, assistive technologies, and participation.

Case 1: Insights of students with physical disability challenges faced at campus: "I am a law student at University of Jammu. I have lived with cerebral palsy since childhood and have been certified as a 100% disabled person. My disability affects my movement and daily activities, but I have never let it stop me from pursuing education and goals. I have a three-wheeler scooter designed for persons with disabilities that helps me travel independently to the university. It has given me confidence and freedom because I do not have to depend completely on others for transportation. At the university, things have improved, but many

problems remain. Some places have ramps, but complete accessibility is still missing. In some buildings, I need help because I cannot move freely with my scooter or wheelchair. Washrooms are also not always accessible. When facilities are unavailable, I have to depend on others, which affects my confidence and independence. I want to be recognised for my abilities and academic performance, not only for my disability. My teachers and classmates are supportive, but support should not depend only on individual kindness. Proper systems should be in place so students with disabilities can study with dignity and without asking for help every time. Studying law has taught me about rights and equality, and I hope students with disabilities will not have to struggle for facilities already guaranteed under the law. I do not want sympathy. I want equal opportunities to study, move independently, and build my career with dignity. Students with disabilities are often overlooked in sports and extracurricular activities because of inaccessible facilities, adapted equipment, and disability-inclusive programmes. Accessibility should not end at the gate. A person with a disability should be able to move freely on campus, attend classes, use facilities independently, participate equally, and not face barriers created by poor infrastructure. I want to become a lawyer and work for disability rights."



Case study 2: challenges faced by visual impairment: “I am a 100% visually impaired student pursuing my M.A. in Dogri at the University of Jammu. I have lived with blindness since childhood, and growing up was difficult. Activities other children did independently often required support and determination from me and my family. Despite this, my parents encouraged me to continue my education and never let my disability make me give up my dreams. My journey improved when I joined the Blind School at Roop Nagar. The school shaped my confidence and independence. The teachers understood the needs of visually impaired students and provided Braille books, mobility training, accessible materials, and guidance. They believed in us and motivated us to pursue education. With their support, I developed confidence and learned to live independently. At university, support for visually impaired students was limited. During admission, I received guidance on the process, but not counseling for academic and accessibility needs. Many teachers were unfamiliar with assistive technologies and accessible resources. Sometimes study materials were unavailable in accessible formats, and I had to depend on classmates or family. Willingness to help is important, but awareness and training are equally necessary. Accessibility means students can study independently, access resources, participate in discussions, and complete academic work without barriers. Despite these challenges, I continue my studies because education is the key to independence and self-respect. I want equal opportunities, resources, trained teachers, and dignity.”

Case study 3: challenges faced by hearing impaired student:

“Since childhood, I have had auditory impairment, and it has not been easy. At school, I learned differently because I could not hear teachers clearly or follow when many students spoke at once. I missed instructions and relied on friends. Some assumed weak hearing meant I could not gain knowledge, but that was untrue. Throughout school, I depended on lip-reading, facial expressions, and teachers’ gestures, which required constant concentration and left me exhausted. At the University of Jammu, I hoped for support, but challenges continued. There was no sign language interpreter in lectures, seminars, or academic programmes. Most teachers were supportive, but few knew how to teach students with hearing impairment. Many spoke facing the board, making lip-reading impossible. Group discussions were difficult because several people spoke simultaneously. My main challenge is communication. I hesitate to ask teachers to repeat themselves and miss explanations. Universities should provide sign language interpreters, captioned materials, assistive listening devices, and faculty training. I want equal opportunities, accessible communication, and dignity. Educational videos are not always captioned.”

8. CRITICAL APPRAISAL OF GOVERNMENT POLICY MEASURES

India has progressed in disability inclusion through the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (RPwD) Act, 2016, the Accessible India Campaign, Unique Disability ID (UDID)

Project, and employment and social security schemes. However, Jammu studies show a gap between policy and implementation. RPwD Act, 2016: Participants reported poor implementation in accessibility, accommodation, infrastructure, assistive technologies, and inclusive education and workplaces. Accessible India Campaign: Some institutions introduced ramps, but toilets, lifts, tactile paths, sign language support, and digital accessibility remain insufficient. Skill Development Initiatives: Limited awareness, training, and industry linkages reduced effectiveness and sustainable employment. Social Security and Welfare Schemes: Inadequate benefits, delays, and low awareness limit access. Awareness Generation Programmes: Negative attitudes, stigma, and limited awareness among employers, educators, and administrators hinder inclusion. Research and Assistive Technology: Case studies showed limited assistive technologies, reflecting a disconnect between policy intentions and implementation. UDID Project: The UDID card has improved access to disability-related services, but issues, delays, and digital literacy still reduce effectiveness. Private Sector Employment Incentives: Despite government incentives, private employers remain reluctant to recruit persons with disabilities, reflecting limited awareness and weak monitoring. Overall, the Jammu case studies suggest that India has a legislative and policy framework, but implementation is inconsistent. Attitudinal barriers, weak accountability, inadequate monitoring, and insufficient resources impede disability inclusion, requiring stronger enforcement and accessibility.

9. FINDINGS: REFLECTING REALITY FROM CASE STUDIES: POLICY GAPS

The case studies describe students with disabilities in higher education institutions across the Jammu region. Although each case is unique, recurring patterns emerged. Thematic analysis organized these experiences into themes and sub-themes capturing challenges, support, and recommendations from students with visual, locomotor, hearing, and speech disabilities. These findings are discussed with disability inclusion policies.

Theme 1: Physical and Environmental Accessibility: It examines how the environment affects students' engagement and autonomy on campus. Sub-themes: inaccessible buildings, classrooms, and hostels; limited accessible transportation; insufficient toilets and amenities; and absence of disability-specific infrastructure such as ramps, lifts, tactile pathways, and signage.

Theme 2: Academic and Learning Experiences: It examines obstacles in teaching, learning, and evaluation. Sub-themes: non-inclusive teaching practices; communication challenges for hearing and speech disabilities; restricted access to accessible study materials; examination difficulties; and insufficient academic accommodations.

Theme 3: Assistive Technology and Institutional Support: It focuses on services and resources that facilitate or hinder



inclusive education. Sub-themes: assistive technology availability and use, disability support services, administrative responsiveness, scholarships and financial aid, and implementation of disability policies.

Theme 4: Social Inclusion and Campus Participation: It highlights students' social interactions and engagement in university life, including peer support and friendships, faculty attitudes and support, stigma and discrimination, extracurricular involvement, and belonging.

Theme 5: Psychological Well-being and Coping Strategies: It addresses students' emotional experiences and how they overcome challenges, including psychological difficulties, self-confidence and self-advocacy, family support, resilience and motivation, and career goals. Theme 6: Recommendations for

Inclusive Higher Education presents suggestions to improve inclusion through physical and digital accessibility, disability-specific assistive technologies, faculty training, sign language support, and stronger policy implementation and monitoring.

The findings from the case studies indicate that, despite significant policy advancements, disability inclusion in practice remains uneven. Participants acknowledged certain positive developments; however, persistent barriers related to accessibility, institutional support, assistive technologies, and inclusive practices continue to limit their full participation. To contextualize these findings within India's disability policy framework, Table 1 presents a comparative analysis of major government initiatives, their intended objectives, evidence emerging from the Jammu case studies, and the corresponding policy gaps.

Table 2. Represents Critical Appraisal of Government Disability Inclusion Policies Based on Jammu Case Studies

Government Policy	Intended Objective	Evidence from Jammu Case Studies	Policy Gap
RPwD Act, 2016	Equal rights and reasonable accommodation	Basic accessibility available, but limited comprehensive support	Weak implementation
Accessible India Campaign	Barrier-free infrastructure	Ramps provided, but toilets, lifts, and digital accessibility remain inadequate	Partial accessibility
Skill Development Programme	Improve employability	Limited awareness and industry linkage	Weak employment outcomes
UDID Project	Simplify access to services	Administrative delays and digital barriers	Implementation challenges
Private Sector Incentive Scheme	Encourage inclusive hiring	Low employer awareness and limited recruitment	Poor uptake

Source: Author's compilation based on Government of India disability policy documents and qualitative case study findings.

10. POLICY SUGGESTIONS FOR DISABILITY INCLUSION

Campus without barriers: Physical accessibility in higher education is fundamental for students with disabilities to navigate campus with dignity and independence. Accessible pathways, ramps, elevators, tactile indicators, and barrier-free classrooms allow free movement across academic and residential areas. Such infrastructure supports movement and reflects institutional commitment to equity and inclusion, removing barriers that limit participation and enabling full engagement in life.

Concession in syllabus: Vast syllabus is difficult to cover; therefore, it must be prioritized according to the needs of every disabled to make learning effective.

Organizing sports activities for inclusion: Sports is the best activity for disabled because it enhances stamina, muscle strength, and cognitive thinking; therefore, sports activities should be organized by the Sports department, and government should take steps so every disabled can participate and enhance moral. Recently, Purple Fest was organized by the J and K government, and more such cultural activities should be organized to bring inclusivity and communication accessibility.

Accessible classrooms are essential for inclusive educational institutions: Classes must be wheelchair accessible. Libraries, seminar halls, auditoriums, and separate accessible washrooms for girls and boys should be infrastructurally inclusive. All higher education institutions should, by policy, provide alternate forms of communication, including flexible classroom participation, speech-to-text services, and AAC tools. Schools must ensure students can reply in writing, using assistive technology, or recorded audio without consequences. Policies should promote peer-mentor programs that foster positive communication, safe places recognizing communication differences, and anti-bullying measures for pupils with speech impairments among classmates. **For hearing:** video -based information while performing task or lectures for Hearing impaired. HEIs should ensure that digital and classroom learning materials are fully accessible. Policies must mandate captioned videos, clear visual presentations.

Separate classes must be arranged separately once in a week to clear doubts and more efficient learning and final examinations to be conducted separately to meet the demand of every disabled



Provision of writer: Writer must be provided by the institutions and National and state-level education authorities should make it compulsory for universities and HEI's to provide Braille, tactile diagrams, audio books, and screen-reader-compatible digital content well before the academic semester begins.

Sign language interpreter: HEIs should adopt and maintain assistive technologies such as hearing loops, captioning software and visual alert systems. Policies must ensure that classrooms, auditoriums, and hostels are equipped with communication-friendly infrastructure.

CONCLUSION

India's disability inclusion has advanced through the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (RPwD) Act, 2016, the Accessible India Campaign, the UDID initiative, NEP 2020, and commitments to the UNCRPD and SDGs. These measures created a framework for opportunity and inclusive education, yet students with disabilities in Jammu face a gap between policy and implementation. Case studies show inaccessible infrastructure, inadequate assistive technologies, delays, limited sign language interpretation, inaccessible learning materials, and disability awareness. Efforts remain fragmented rather than institutionalized. Inclusion requires accessible pedagogy, academic accommodations, psychosocial support, inclusive extracurricular participation, student involvement in decision-making, and a shift to a rights-based approach. Implementation needs audits, funding, monitoring, accountability, capacity-building, disability support centers, grievance redressal, and collaboration among agencies, universities, organizations, and communities.

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