



## “Ain’t I a Human”: Disabled Students, Inclusive Schooling and the Experiences of their Inclusion in India

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### ABSTRACT

In school education, an ongoing interest in exploring the voices of disabled students has been reflected in a number of studies in western societies. However, literature reveals that despite strong advocacy for inclusion, the reality of school life for students with disabilities remains largely one of continued exclusion and barriers to learning. In most developing countries, including India, the voices of the students with disabilities appear significantly unexplored, not only in the policy making process but in the research as well. This paper aims to address this lacuna by focusing on exploring the disabled students' educational experiences, the barriers and support they encountered in school education, and the attitudes they experienced from the school community. Results of the study demonstrate common experiences of a lack of support networks and differential experiences of socio-cultural activities. The article indicates the need for refining school practices and adopting more nuanced approaches to inclusion.

**Keywords:** Disabled students voices, inclusive schooling, barriers, support

### INTRODUCTION

Inclusive education is a buzzword, and it has been seen as an international agenda running parallel to the objective of Education for All (EFA) (Kalyanpur, 2011). Across the world, inclusive education has gained prominence since the United Nations Convention for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in 2006. Since then, fulfilling the promise of education for all and leaving no one behind has been a global concern and many countries have achieved the said goal of providing equal access to quality, inclusive and free primary and secondary education to students with disabilities on an equal basis with others. However, the development of more inclusive school environments calls for a specific focus on the disabled students' accounts of their lived schooling experience. As Gordon (2010) vehemently states, knowing the inputs of the disabled students is vital in understanding how effectively and successfully inclusive education is being implemented. In the global north, many issues encountered by disabled students in their process of inclusive schooling have been addressed in the research. Whereas, research addressing the issues of disability and inclusion in the developing countries from the perspectives of

disabled students is limited and tends to focus on issues such as the prevalence of inclusive education (Singal, 2016; UNESCO, 2011), teacher attitudes and concerns (Pasha 2012; Shah, Das, Desai, and Tiwari 2016; Yu, Su, & Liu 2011) and analysis of the educational policies for inclusion (Kalyanpur, 2016; Serpell & Folotiya, 2011; Singal, 2019).

The focus of this paper is on the Indian context. Since becoming a signatory to the *Salamanca Statement* (an international framework that brought inclusive system of education to the forefront (UNESCO, 1994), India committed itself to the development of 'inclusive education'. Since then, there has been a dramatic increase in the enrolment of children with disabilities in mainstream schools of India with approximately 2.29 million disabled children currently enrolled in elementary classes (NUEPA, 2016). Despite significant gains in enrolment, there has been growing concerns in relation to the increased dropout rates (UNESCO, 2019), low regular attendance (Bhattacharjea, Wadhwa & Banerji, 2017), and newer enrolment of disabled children in schools (UNESCO, 2019). There is a dearth of literature in context to the classroom-based explorations and, more specifically, the disabled students' narratives of their schooling experiences.

The present paper attempts to address this gap in literature by focusing on the disabled students' narratives in relation to their educational experiences in mainstream schools. The purpose of this qualitative study is to analyze the barriers and support these students face in schools in light of the policy guidelines for their

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support. Here, ‘disabled students’ include students with blindness, impaired vision, mobility impairment, speech impairment and those who are deaf. The study is based on the assumption that examining the disabled students’ narratives is important as it provides an insight into the on-going practices of inclusive education at mainstream schools. The significance of the present study cannot be overstated as it is difficult to exaggerate the importance of research that makes an effort to hear the voices of disabled people in contexts where they are not only marginalized but have also been rendered invisible in academic and policy discourses (Singal, 2010).

## THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Historically, disability as a discourse was not taken into account while debating the issues of prejudice and discrimination. The disabled were rather perceived through a medical gaze aspect of a person’s identity, often addressed as passive objects in need of diagnosis and excluded from the mainstream society (Oliver, 1998). In this way, labeling and treating disabled people unequally was normalized on the basis of their alleged deficient and inferior identities (Kalyanpur, 2008). Thus, the medical approach to disability has vehemently viewed disability as an ‘individual problem’ rather than critically engaging with exclusionary processes and disempowerment of disabled people in the system.

The concept of disability, according to social model, is an issue of oppression that is culturally produced and socially structured (Oliver, 1999). According to Armstrong and Barton (1999), the social model, in contrast, does not see disablement as the functional limitation of the body but rather as a catalyst for discrimination and social oppression. In this sense, it is likely the inaccessible and unchanged school environment that creates the hurdles hampering the inclusion of students with disabilities. Nevertheless, social model is crucial in understanding the disability discrimination. It assists social actors to raise their voice by building a political strategy in the form of disability activism against exclusion and inequality (Shakespeare, 2010). In this sense, it has an important ‘educative function’.

Across the global north, there is a considerable body of literature identifying the hidden structures of subordination and barriers hampering the participation, progress and learning of disabled students in schools and society. These barriers are mainly attitudinal (Leicester & Lovell, 1997), structural (MacEachern, et al., 2022), and support-related (Vlachou, Didaskalou & Argyrakouli, 2006). Oliver and Barnes (2010) concluded that participation of disabled students in school environments is hindered by inaccessible curricula, negative attitudes of teachers towards the disabled and, above all, infrastructural barriers (Yoshida, Shanouda, & Ellis, 2014). Moreover, students with disabilities face additional barriers which are reinforced by the structural organization of schools and the beliefs and actions of non-disabled adults towards disabled (Davis & Watson, 2001).

Existing literature examining the interpersonal relationships of disabled students with their non-disabled peers indicates experiences of harassment and discriminatory attitudes of general students in the schools’ social context (Anderman & Kimveli, 1997; Closs et al., 2001; McMaugh, 2001). However, as found by Davis and Watson (2001), children with disabilities are not merely the agents of oppressive forces but rather play a critical role in engaging with everyday disabling discourses around them. Slee (2001) argued that in most cases, the opportunities and activism of disabled students in decision making are barred as a result of the politics of identity, difference, and representation present in a variety of social contexts, including education.

Applying the ‘excluded voice’ thesis (Booth, 1996), it is evident that listening to the students’ voices and narratives opens up channels through which one may reflect on the range of attitudes, practices, and information about inclusive education. Indeed, a number of studies make the case that listening to students’ educational experiences may assist schools in developing more inclusive practices (Ainscow et al., 1999; Corbett & Slee, 2000; Sebba & Sachdev, 1997; Tangen, 2008). The general consensus is that disabled students, being the experts of their lived experiences should be considered an essential source of information representing the hidden structures of subordination as well as the proposals for an inclusive educational framework.

In the light of this background, the present study aimed at exploring the lived experiences of students with disabilities on three fronts: education in mainstream elementary schools; support and barriers to inclusive education. Here, the concept of *support* and *barriers* are linked to the social model of disability, and in this sense, the research understands ‘support’ as the set of interrelated factors such as academic support and incentives, teaching strategies and attitudes, etc. Barriers, on the other hand, include factors that hinder access, participation, and overall learning of disabled students on an equal basis. However, before embarking into any further analysis, it seems important to mention that in the Indian context, most of the research studies in this field are based on subjective explorations (Johansson, Singal & Samson 2021; Singal, 2008) and/or teacher-based surveys (Bawane, 2019; Shah et al., 2016; Sharma, Moore & Sonawane, 2009). One of the few studies available (Naraian & Nataranjan, 2013) concluded that disabled students lack the experience of meaningful relationships with their peers. The studies mentioned argue that implementation of inclusive education is impeded by challenges including poor school infrastructure, lack of resources, inadequate training combined with negative attitudes of staff, poor support networks, and limited knowledge to meet the learning needs of children with disabilities. Despite the above facts, this paper attempts to investigate disabled students’ narratives about their schooling experiences in government schools.

## METHODOLOGY

The findings presented in this article fall within the major research project entitled '*Inclusive Education in Jammu and Kashmir: A Sociological Study of Disabled Students of government schools.*' This part of the research aims, primarily, to examine the barriers and support identified by disabled students themselves about their schooling experiences. Following this aim, in-depth qualitative data was collected across three districts: Anantnag, Pulwama and Kulgam, in the southern part of the state. However, given the lack of data concerning the type of disability of the students enrolled in government schools in the state, recruiting participants from snowball sampling was deemed more appropriate than the other sampling procedures in hand.

To this end, we draw a sample of participants from all three regions by following two stages. In the first stage, Tehsil Social Welfare Offices (A district level government office under the Department of Social Welfare, Government of India aimed at addressing the problems of weaker sections of the society.) were approached to share the information of the disabled students' beneficiaries after explaining them the purpose of the study. In the second stage, individual meetings with the identified participants enrolled in schools were carried out. Following this, using so called snowball sampling, they were asked to refer to the other school enrolled peers in the adjoining areas. Specifically, the final sample consisted of 44 school children with disabilities (31 males and 13 females) who responded to the open call and reported their willingness to participate in the research. Of these, the majority of the participants (21/44) were with physical/mobility impairment, thirteen participants (13/44) were with visual impairment/blindness, six students were with hearing problems/deaf, and the remaining four (4/44) were students with speech impairment. Fifteen (15/44) of the participants had experience of primary schooling in special schools with outreach special support.

To understand the participants' narratives of their inclusive schooling, semi-structured interviews were used based on the work done by Cefai and Cooper (2010). The interview schedule tapped questions related to the various aspects of students' school experiences, the learning and attitude problems they encounter in their access to and participation in inclusive education. All the interviews were open-ended, and conducted face-to-face, except in four cases in which a sign language interpreter was hired. All interviews were conducted in Kashmiri and Urdu, audio-recorded and translated into English. Before interviews, participants were fully informed about the purpose and aim of the study, and they were assured about the anonymous procedures that have been used throughout the article, in reference to the participants' affiliation and place of residence.

Qualitative data analysis was carried out. All interviews were transcribed verbatim and analyzed using QSR-NVivo 8, a computer software program designed to assist in qualitative data analysis. Analysis of the coded data is based on the principle of an inductive data-driven approach (Boyatzis, 1998). Following

this process, transcribed interviews were read thoroughly, and thoughts in the form of codes were identified and compared with the transcript of the categories of questions that comprised the interview schedule. In the next stage, the process of organizing and comparing the first-level thematic coding with the literature in hand entailed the basic descriptive codes. This was followed by the inductive categorization of descriptive codes to pull forward the emerging themes and key concepts from the data (Neuman, 2014). To ensure the credibility of the emerging themes, another researcher-an expert in this field, reviewed the data and coded transcripts and confirmed the adequate and inadequate categories from the list. Moreover, inter-rated reliability was determined by dividing the number of agreed categories by the sum of total agreements and disagreements, multiplied by 100. After the calculations, inter-rated reliability was an average of 85.4%. Thus, this research has followed a qualitative thematic-analysis approach.

## RESULTS

**Table 1. Overview of the research participants**

Type of Disability	Gender		Level of School			
	Male	Female	Primary	Middle	High School	Higher Secondary
Mobility	16	5	2	6	8	5
Visual	8	5	1	7	3	2
Hearing	4	2	0	3	2	1
Speech	3	1	0	3	1	0
Total	31	13	3	19	14	8

### Choice of School

In analyzing their schooling experiences in terms of the level of schooling and the choice of schools, participants brought to light diverse views and made reference to people who influenced them in their schooling decisions. With regard to the choice of school, it was clear that some of the research participants had been exclusively in both special and mainstream schools. They revealed the role of their families in influencing their schooling decisions. As Hamza put it, 'Before here, I was in Zeba Aapa Institute of Inclusive Education, commonly known as Zaiba Aapa is a special school in district Anantnag that caters to the educational needs for children with disabilities. It aims at providing academic, therapeutic, and training services to children with disabilities such as visual impairment, mobility disorder, learning disability, deaf and dumb etc. (Mir, 2020) and now I am enrolled here because my parents chose this school for me'. Revealing his experiences from the past year of school, he said,

Zeba Aapa has done for me what this school could not do in ages. I learned a lot of things there. It is clear that I am a person with a disability, but the way this school trained me in academics brings me closer to a normal person. I miss my friends and teachers there. They taught me a lot of things to do and are still helping me on the weekends. No doubt, that was a segregated special school, but the sense of inclusiveness I experienced there was so strong I just couldn't forget it ever. (Hamza)

Choosing mainstream schools as a mode of educational access was not a matter of choice made by all; rather, for some, this was the result of various difficulties such as lack of special schools, large distance to special schools and organizational pressure. This was mostly evident in the case of students attending high school education.

I chose this school because I had no other option. There is only one special school in the district, and it provides education to the disabled only up to the elementary level. (Taiba)

People told my father that the government school in our village had access to disabled students. So, my father admitted me here. In reality, the experience is disappointing because, from infrastructure to education, this school lacks access for disabled students. (Mehran)

Above all the personal reasons, the participants' choice of regular institutions was highly associated with the negative sanctions of mainstream society. Many participants spoke of the perceived beliefs of society, particularly in relation to the segregated education of children with disabilities. As Rashid, a participant with Down syndrome, put it, 'because of this prevalent belief that "impaired are born to isolation," my father decided to enrol me at this mainstream school because going through this stigma was plugging the abnormality in me'.

In analyzing the participation and access of those who had been to regular schools as a matter of choice, it was clear that the majority of them had to struggle with the issues of accessibility in terms of physical access, mobility, academic knowledge, and social life. For them, being in mainstream schools with zero support networks is more like a bane than a blessing.

To be quite honest, the admission in government schools is free, but, I see nothing here in practise that corresponds to what they say about inclusive schooling. For me, a school is inclusive if it has accessible infrastructure. You need teachers who care about you and understand you. The most important thing is an equal attitude towards disabled. But what I am experiencing here is quite opposite to that. (Gurpreet)

#### **Inclusive Education: Bane or Blessing**

With regard to their experiences in mainstream settings, participants brought to light a number of issues (positive or negative) which promoted or hindered their progress towards inclusion in regular schools. However, it was clear from each case that barriers outnumbered the instances of support identified. In this section, an analysis of the narratives of mainstream educational experiences revealed by disabled students is discussed.

Almost all the participants revealed that they felt a range of hurdles with the unwillingness and/or inability of schools to accommodate their learning needs and to ensure accessibility in terms of infrastructural access and mobility. With respect to physical access, the majority of the participants talked about the unavailability of elevators, ramps and wheelchairs, inaccessible toilets, and classrooms with poor seating arrangements. As one participant put it, 'because of the lack of ramps, I am unable to move around safely'. Lack of

access and structural changes lead to situations in which students find themselves as victims of alienation, leading them to a self-fulfilling prophecy about themselves and their abilities. This is illustrated in the interview with Majid, as he commented:

Everyone knows that for children with mobility disorders, wheelchair is an essential need. But what can a student do if he/she is unable to use it within school premises? The same is the case with me. I have a wheelchair of my own, but I am unable to use it because of the physical barriers at school. I usually move around the school building by crawling and feel that all eyes are staring at me... I felt alienated. At times, it seems like I am losing my abilities and a sense of belonging here.

In addition to the perceived lack of infrastructural support, the lack of pedagogical support based on new innovations and practices was cited by almost all participants as a significant barrier to inclusive schooling. They disliked traditional teaching practices at schools based mainly on the 'chalk and talk' methodology with zero application to practical situations. The analysis revealed a lack of experience and training on the part of teachers in terms of teaching the disabled, providing additional support in classes and the use of specific materials and methodologies. Revealing her dissatisfaction with learning and participation, one participant said:

They (teachers) follow their own methods of teaching. There is no inclusive strategy for delivering a class lecture. They see me like the other students and don't care for anything. I just record the lectures and understand them at home. (Farhat)

Another said:

Lack of expertise! I think they need to have some kind of training to deal with the disabled students in an inclusive classroom. (Afshana)

Participants were asked to reflect on the nature of social interactions they have with their teachers and school peers, as well as the attitudes that promote or hinder their inclusion in schools. The findings indicated that the majority of the participants felt that getting along with their peers was a good thing. They discussed the experiences of unity, care, and support with their typically developing peers: 'They are just awesome. They always help me. We learn together and enjoy games together.' Almost one third of the participants recalled negative experiences with fellow peers, with some cases of ignorance, humiliation and bullying. This was mostly evident in the cases of students with visual and/or speech impairments.

Even though I sit at the back, they look at me strangely, shout at me with slurs and call me with different names. I, along with all the other disabled students in the school are the victims of their humiliation. (Faisal)

Apart from the peer group relationships, almost two-thirds of the participants revealed their relationships with their regular teachers as indifferent and inadequate. As reported by the participants, the attitude of teachers both in terms of teaching and interaction was found to be unsupportive, ignorant and full of anger. Although, the social aspects of schooling are

considered a significant aspect of inclusive schooling, the study found that teachers' interpersonal relationships towards disabled students contribute more to widespread rejection and exclusion in schools.

At times, they (teachers) sound extremely aggressive, shout at me, and blame me for their low academic feedback. Let me tell you, I gave up attending school because I found no reason to be in a classroom. Neither do they answer my questions nor do they pay attention to me. I felt like I didn't exist for most of them. Surprisingly, from the day I report my problems to the school principal, I face insults, ignorance, stereotypes and sometimes physical aggression from her (the teacher). (Bilal)

In contrast, there were cases where participants recalled positive interactions with some regular teachers. For them, the supportive attitude of teachers provided a framework that helped them find stability in an environment full of disgust and shame, to believe in themselves, and to find meaning in their future aspirations. Simran, a participant with a visual impairment, described her experience:

For me, they are a blessing. They help me in every aspect of my life. They are my eyes. The way they guide and encourage me in everything is beyond imagination.

Similarly, Dawood, a student with a mobility impairment said,

I have been at this school for nearly five years. I have teachers who are helpful, caring and humble in their behavior. They are always there for me and encourage me to do things beyond my impairment. For example, one day the school was going on an excursion and when they came to know that I refused to join, they encouraged me by saying "come on dear, you can join us. You can enjoy it the way others do." From that day on, I started taking part in all the activities of the school.

Despite the lack of social support, many participants pointed out the lack of institutional support in the form of appropriate guidance, awareness of issues, and counseling as being more problematic. Students spoke of how difficult it was to appear for the annual board exams in other schools and expressed their grief over a lack of information regarding exam preparation, model test papers, and arranging a writer. Another obstacle to accessing full inclusion identified by participants was the issue of a lack of information related to the grant-in-aid for disabled students. Several participants revealed their experiences of bureaucratic hurdles (for example, paperwork procedures, doctors' consent etc.) that they faced throughout the process.

...providing an annual grant of Rs 600 despite the fact that an annual grant of Rs 3500 is being sanctioned to every disabled student under Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan (A centrally sponsored scheme under the Ministry of Education, Government of India aimed at the universalization of elementary education. Under this scheme a stipend of Rs. 3500 per annum is allocated to each child with disability studying in government, government-aided and local body schools) this way they (stakeholders) are releasing the grants in my favour and I am wondering whether we should call this a grant-in-aid or a charity. (Insha)

From the above excerpt, it is evident that there appeared to be a vast gap between what is expected in support from the policies for disabled and the reality, however, in practise.

### **Dreaming of an Inclusive School**

Irrespective of the perceived obstacles towards education, almost all participants, across the sample, viewed inclusive education as a paramount reality in advancing their capabilities. Consequently, the majority of the participants dream that an ideal inclusive school is one which is designed on the basis of the following thoughts:

Upon admission, schools need to distribute an information brochure regarding the structure and operation of the school as well as regarding the facilities and support services available for children with disabilities.

Regarding mobility and access, schools need to reshape the available physical spaces with disabled-friendly designs and resources.

In relation to teaching methodologies, there should be more opportunities for hands-on learning and innovative strategies instead of just relying on traditional teaching strategies.

Ensure the availability of resource rooms in regular schools so as to promote mechanisms of guidance, training, and extra support for students with disabilities.

Collaborate with disability-specific professions and organisations to learn about disability issues and contribute to improving educational delivery to children with disabilities.

Normalize specific training and guidance for the academic community, so that disabled students are perceived as having individual needs and rights to inclusive education.

Finally, participants stressed the need for a more inclusive, student-centric approach rather than a school-centric one, which rests more on the philosophy of 'integrated' rather than 'inclusive education'.

## **DISCUSSION**

The aim of this study was to explore the personal narratives of the academic and social experiences of disabled students in regular schools in Jammu and Kashmir, India. With the specific aim of representing the voices of disabled students, the study brought into light a range of lived experiences related to the different aspects of their schooling. Given the fact that disabled students share one voice, this is not to conclude that they represent the whole truth about themselves or the ones with a same identity (Gallacher & Gallagher, 2008). We do recognize, however, that disabled students, by virtue of their identity are best placed to produce adequate information of the current discourses and, therefore, can contribute to a better understanding of the challenges about their schooling and inclusive education (Cefai & Cooper, 2010).

Keeping with the above facts, the findings of the study reveal a number of insights about how disabled students experience and negotiate their participation at regular public schools. A general interpretation of the results shows that mainstream institutions have failed in facilitating inclusive learning and socialization, instead of contributing to the atmosphere of

prejudice and discrimination of students within schools (Pitt & Curtin, 2004; Gibson, 2006; Shah, 2007). On the negative side, participants seemed to express grief with respect to their schooling choice, academic arrangements, social aspects of schooling, and personal dilemmas of fear and isolation.

With regard to the choice of school, the findings revealed that majority of the participants lacked the choice with regard to the school they would have liked to attend. This is to say, participants, especially at the secondary level attended mainstream schools not out of choice but largely due to a lack of alternative educational settings within the neighborhood. This implies that students' choice of schooling was influenced by pressure(s) to fit into an already existing educational system, leaving little room for celebrating difference. This resonates with the findings of Sawhney (2015) and Deiz (2010) suggesting that despite the predominant trend of offering inclusive education, the practical paradigm in schools is still integration. Deiz further said, 'to the extent that this is true, the integration model perpetuates processes of assimilation in the classroom, a reality that is aggravated by the absence of a critical revision of mainstream educational practices' (2010: 173).

As far as the barriers affecting the participation of disabled students and access to knowledge within regular schools are considered, the results are indicative of the lack of appropriate educational services and support networks. Indeed, participants' narratives focused on the inability of the schools to fulfill their needs in terms of accessible infrastructure, inclusive curriculum, diversity in teaching methodologies, and general support. No changes in infrastructure were made to affect students with physical disabilities on a regular basis, whereas inaccessible curriculum and teaching targeted the educational development of children with sensory impairments. Confronted to the above difficulties, many participants felt victimized by the school system that indirectly labels them as dependent and put them at risk of social isolation and failure. This negative image of self-identity puts them in dilemmas of difference which sometimes lead to self-fulfilling prophecy.

In relation to the social aspect of schooling, the relationship between teachers and students has been consistently shown in the literature to be a major factor in the development of students with disabilities. With regard to peers, the study found examples of relationships ranging from fair, compassionate, and supportive friendships to those full of humiliation, oppression, and bullying. The negative cases of friendship, however, were seen as triggering the problems of loneliness and exclusion among participants. The findings of the study support research demonstrating the experiences of positive social relationships between students with and without disabilities (Bax, 1999; Curtin & Clark, 2005; Davis & Watson, 2001; Sebba & Sachdev, 1997). As well as the literature demonstrating the stories of ostracism, hatred, and discriminatory attitudes by their non-disabled peers (Curtin & Clark, 2005; Gibson & Kendall, 2010; Llewellyn, 2000; McMaugh, 2011).

The findings revealed indifferent relationships with the teachers as described by the participants with terms such as unfair, rigid, unsupportive and oppressive resulting in the disengagement and alienation of disabled students from the system. The students underlined the need for a more inclusive, democratic, and humane educational system (Deci et al., 1991; Leicester & Lovell, 1997). They stressed the need for an education where they would have the right to put their voice, be treated equally and not bullied on the basis of their identity and impairment. (Davies, 2005; Davis & Watson, 2001; Diez, 2010; Garner, 1993; Wise, 2000). In fact, the most crucial aspect of the inclusive system was the students' concerns towards other alternative options of schooling for example segregated special schools as free from the challenges they are encountering in mainstream schools.

The study in line with the previous studies (Singal, 2006; Sawhney, 2015), suggests that inclusive education in India needs a critical examination within the realities of the Indian context. Firstly, there is a need to end the culture of silence within educational institutions so as to give voice to the voiceless and involve them in the decision-making process regarding multiple strategies at schools. Giving voice to disabled at school is set to enhance the interpersonal relationship between teachers and students, improve the quality of their interest in learning and participation, and apparently contributes to the overall academic development and behavior control. Secondly, teachers need to conceive students as valuable members of society instead of labeling them on the basis of their beliefs about identity and/or impairment. Giving away the negative attitudes is thus perceived as welcoming positive teaching strategies, extra support, guidance and practical engagement to the education of students with disabilities. Thirdly, schools need to adopt inclusive practices and ensure support services in the form of accessible infrastructure, curriculum, teaching-learning materials, and new assistive technologies in order to attain the actual face of inclusion in practice. Lastly, regular schools in general need to play a critical role in condemning discourses that tend to legitimize any sort of educational exclusion of students with disabilities. Naturally, this means we need to rethink the way we practice inclusion in schools.

## CONCLUSION

A general interpretation of the findings of this study leads one to conclude that inclusive education in India is just an alternative option for children rather than a serious concept to address the learning needs and specialization of disabled children. Echoing with the findings of Singal (2005) the study concluded that inclusion in India is all about the placement of children, particularly those with impairments, in mainstream settings rather than a critical engagement of the exclusionary practices operating in the system. Resonating with this, the study highlights the difficulties in the educational experiences of participants while trying to engage with the system of 'Education for all'. On the whole, the findings indicate the

narrow perspective of inclusive education by exposing stories of the withstand exclusion and oppression of children with disabilities. Within this complex mix, the study with regard to their preference for education, strategies needed for developing learning and the type of support required to assist their educational needs. Therefore, it is imperative for those who control schools to take into account the voices of children so as to challenge the existing barriers and accommodate the diversity in the views and opinions of disabled students' individual needs. In short, the common slogan of the disability movement sums it up "nothing about us without us" (Charlton, 2000).

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## CONFLICT OF INTEREST

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