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Research Article

Multiple Disability in India: Prevalence, Educational Challenges, and Inclusive Pathways for General Teachers (2026)

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Abstract

Multiple disabilities refer to the co-existence of two or more impairments in an individual, resulting in complex educational and developmental needs. The present study examines the prevalence of multiple disabilities in India using updated data trends (2024–2026), identifies the educational challenges faced by such learners, and explores inclusive pathways for general teachers.

The study adopts a descriptive research design and is based on secondary data from sources such as the National Family Health Survey-5, Census of India 2011, and recent government reports. Findings indicate that disability prevalence in India is estimated between 2.2%–4.5%, with a significant proportion experiencing multiple disabilities. Despite policy advancements, challenges persist in teacher training, infrastructure, and inclusive practices.

The study concludes that strengthening teacher preparedness, improving accessibility, and adopting inclusive strategies are essential for achieving equitable education outcomes.

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1. INTRODUCTION

India has strengthened inclusive education through policies such as the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016 and the National Education Policy 2020. However, effective implementation depends largely on teacher preparedness and school resources.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study is to:

- Examine updated prevalence trends of multiple disabilities in India
- Identify key educational challenges
- Suggest inclusive teaching pathways for general teachers

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

A growing body of research highlights the importance of inclusive education for children with disabilities, particularly those with multiple disabilities who require complex and coordinated support systems.

Recent global and national studies indicate that while inclusive education policies have expanded, implementation challenges remain significant, especially in developing countries like India. According to UNESCO (2023) [7], inclusive education systems must focus not only on access but also on participation and learning outcomes, particularly for children with multiple disabilities who are often the most excluded group.

Studies based on NFHS-5 (2019–21) [5] and recent analyses (2023–2025) suggest that disability prevalence in India is higher than previously reported, largely due to improved identification and awareness. However, children with multiple disabilities continue to face greater educational exclusion, particularly in rural and socio-economically disadvantaged areas.

Research by Sharma and Deppeler (2023) [10] emphasizes that teacher attitudes and preparedness are among the most critical factors influencing inclusive education. Teachers with prior training in special education demonstrate more positive attitudes, higher confidence, and better classroom practices compared to those without training.

Similarly, a study by Forlin (2024) [11] highlights that general teachers often feel underprepared to handle diverse learning needs, particularly when dealing with multiple disabilities that require differentiated instruction and multi-sensory teaching approaches. The study stresses the importance of continuous professional development and hands-on training.

In the Indian context, recent studies (2024–2025) reveal that although policies such as the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016 and National Education Policy 2020 promote inclusive education, ground-level implementation is inconsistent. Key barriers include:

- Lack of trained teachers
- Inadequate infrastructure
- Limited availability of assistive devices
- Overcrowded classrooms

A study by Das and Kattumuri (2024) [12] found that infrastructure and accessibility remain major challenges in Indian schools, particularly in government and low-resource private schools. The absence of barrier-free environments significantly restricts the participation of children with multiple disabilities.

Research also highlights the role of assistive technology in enhancing inclusion. According to recent findings (2025), tools such as screen readers, augmentative communication devices, and audio-visual aids improve engagement and learning outcomes. However, access to such technologies remains limited due to cost and lack of awareness.

Furthermore, collaborative approaches involving special educators, therapists, and parents have been identified as effective strategies for supporting children with multiple disabilities. Studies suggest that multidisciplinary support systems lead to better academic and social outcomes.

Despite these advancements, there is still a lack of focused research specifically addressing multiple disabilities as a distinct category, particularly in the Indian education system. Most studies tend to focus on single disabilities, thereby overlooking the complexity and intersectionality of multiple impairments.

RESEARCH GAP

- Lack of updated research focusing on multiple disabilities (2024–2026 context)
- Limited emphasis on general teachers' role
- Insufficient focus on practical classroom implementation
- Data gaps due to absence of recent census updates

3. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To examine the prevalence of multiple disabilities in India
2. To analyse educational challenges faced by such learners
3. To identify inclusive pathways for general teachers

4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

- **Research Design:** Descriptive
- **Data Source:** Secondary data (NFHS-5, NSSO, reports)
- **Approach:** Analytical

Analysis (Updated 2026 Perspective)

H_{01}: There is a significant prevalence of multiple disabilities in India.

Table 1: Updated Prevalence Data (2024–2026 Trend)

Source	Disability Prevalence	Remarks
National Family Health Survey-5	~4.5%	Higher than census estimate
Census of India 2011	2.21%	Outdated baseline
NSSO Reports	~2.2%	Underreporting noted

Interpretation:
Recent data shows increase in reported disability prevalence, indicating better identification. Therefore, H0 is rejected.
The data presented in Table 1 clearly indicates that disability prevalence in India has shown an upward trend when comparing older and recent datasets. While the Census of India 2011 reported a prevalence of 2.21%, more recent estimates from NFHS-5 and related analyses suggest figures approaching 4–4.5%. This increase does not necessarily indicate a sudden rise in disability incidence but rather reflects improved identification, awareness, and reporting mechanisms.
Importantly, within this broader disability population, individuals with multiple disabilities represent a high-need subgroup, often underreported due to diagnostic complexity. The variation across datasets also highlights inconsistencies in measurement approaches and lack of updated census data.
Thus, the findings confirm that multiple disabilities constitute a significant and growing concern in India's educational and social landscape. The rejection of the null hypothesis is justified, as prevalence is both statistically and socially significant, warranting targeted educational planning and policy intervention

H_{02}: Children with multiple disabilities face significant educational challenges.

Table 2: Nature of Educational Challenges

Challenge	Impact Level	Evidence
Cognitive	High	Learning difficulties
Communication	High	Speech limitations
Physical	Moderate–High	Mobility barriers
Social	Moderate	Isolation

Interpretation:
Challenges are multi-dimensional and severe. Therefore, H_0 is rejected.
The analysis demonstrates that children with multiple disabilities face multi-layered and interrelated challenges that extend beyond academic learning. High impact levels in cognitive and communication domains indicate that these learners struggle with comprehension, expression, and retention of information.
Unlike single disabilities, multiple disabilities create compound barriers, where one impairment intensifies the effect of another. For example, a child with both intellectual and hearing impairment may face severe limitations in both understanding and communication, making traditional teaching methods ineffective.
Social and emotional challenges, though moderate in comparison, are equally critical as they affect peer interaction, self-esteem, and classroom participation. These factors collectively result in reduced academic performance and increased risk of exclusion.
Therefore, the rejection of the null hypothesis is strongly supported. The findings emphasize the need for individualized, multi-sensory, and flexible teaching approaches, as standard classroom practices are insufficient to meet these complex needs.

H_{03}: Infrastructure significantly affects inclusion.

Table 3: Infrastructure Status (India 2026 Context)

Facility	Availability	Impact
Barrier-free access	Limited	Restricts participation
Assistive devices	Inadequate	Learning difficulty
Inclusive classrooms	Partial	Unequal access

Interpretation
Infrastructure gaps remain a major barrier. H_0 is rejected.
The findings from Table 3 highlight that infrastructural limitations remain a major systemic barrier to inclusive education in India. Limited availability of ramps, accessible classrooms, and assistive devices directly restricts the mobility, independence, and participation of children with multiple disabilities.
Inclusion is not solely a pedagogical issue but also a physical and environmental one. Even when teachers are willing to include students, the absence of appropriate infrastructure makes meaningful participation difficult or impossible. This is particularly evident in rural and low-resource settings where schools lack basic accessibility features.
Furthermore, inadequate infrastructure leads to dependency on caregivers or peers, which can negatively affect the child's confidence and autonomy. It also limits the implementation of inclusive strategies such as group work and active participation.
Thus, the rejection of the null hypothesis is justified. The interpretation clearly establishes that infrastructure is a critical enabling factor for inclusion, and without it, policy goals cannot be effectively realized.

H_{04}: Teacher preparedness significantly influences inclusive education.

Table 4: Teacher Preparedness (Recent Trends)

Parameter	Level
Awareness	Moderate
Training	Low
Confidence	Moderate–Low

Interpretation:
Teacher preparedness is still insufficient. H_0 is rejected.
The analysis indicates that while teachers demonstrate a moderate level of awareness, their training and confidence levels remain insufficient for effectively addressing the needs of children with multiple disabilities. This gap between awareness and practical competence is a significant concern.
Teachers often lack exposure to:

- Specialized instructional strategies
- Behavior management techniques
- Use of assistive technologies

As a result, they may feel overwhelmed or under confident, which can lead to passive exclusion or minimal engagement of such students in classroom activities.
Preparedness is not limited to knowledge but includes skills, attitudes, and continuous professional development. Teachers who receive structured training are more likely to adopt inclusive practices and demonstrate positive attitudes.

The rejection of the null hypothesis is therefore well supported. The findings underline that teacher preparedness is a decisive factor in the success of inclusive education and must be strengthened through systematic training programs.

H_{05}: Inclusive strategies improve participation.

Table 5: Impact of Inclusive Strategies

Strategy	Impact
UDL	High
IEP	High
Assistive Technology	Moderate–High

Interpretation

Inclusive strategies significantly improve outcomes. H_0 is rejected.

The findings clearly show that inclusive teaching strategies such as Universal Design for Learning (UDL), Individualized Education Plans (IEPs), and assistive technologies have a high positive impact on student participation and learning outcomes.

These strategies are effective because they:

- Address diverse learning needs
- Provide flexibility in teaching methods
- Enhance accessibility and engagement

For example, UDL allows teachers to present content in multiple formats, while IEPs ensure that learning goals are tailored to individual abilities. Assistive technologies further support communication and comprehension.

However, the effectiveness of these strategies depends on proper implementation and teacher competence. Without adequate training and resources, their potential benefits may not be fully realized.

Thus, the null hypothesis is rejected, confirming that inclusive strategies significantly improve participation. This highlights the importance of integrating such approaches into regular classroom practice.

Inclusive Pathways for General Teachers

General teachers can adopt inclusive practices by:

- Using Universal Design for Learning (UDL)
- Developing Individualized Education Plans (IEPs)
- Using assistive technologies
- Collaborating with specialists and parents

These approaches help in addressing diverse learning needs and promoting inclusion.

5. CONCLUSION

The study concludes that disability prevalence in India is higher than previously reported, reflecting improved identification and awareness. However, children with multiple disabilities continue to face significant challenges due to gaps in infrastructure, teacher training, and implementation of inclusive practices.

To achieve true inclusion, there is a need for:

- Strengthening teacher education
- Improving accessibility
- Ensuring effective policy implementation

SUGGESTIONS

- Introduce specialized training modules for teachers
- Improve school infrastructure
- Promote assistive technology
- Conduct awareness programs
- Strengthen policy monitoring

IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY

- Supports inclusive education reforms
- Enhances teacher preparedness
- Improves classroom practices

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