



# Understanding Learning Differences Across Schools2030 Contexts

Country profiles | India

## COUNTRY PROFILES

## India



### Overview: Defining the concept and terminology of inclusive education

Inclusive education in India is understood as 'a system of education wherein students with and without disability learn together and the system of teaching and learning is suitably adapted to meet the learning needs of different types of students with disabilities', as defined in the 2016 [Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act](#) (RPWD).<sup>1</sup> Existing legislation limits inclusive education to the education of persons with disabilities, and in practice this has focused mainly on individuals with visible disabilities.<sup>2</sup> It is only relatively recently that learning disabilities have been officially recognised and researched in India, with an amendment in 2009 to the Persons with Disabilities Act, 1995 adding the category of Specific Learning Disabilities.<sup>3</sup> In the RPWD Act these are defined as 'a heterogeneous group of conditions wherein there is a deficit in processing language, spoken or written,

that may manifest itself as a difficulty to comprehend, speak, read, write, spell, or to do mathematical calculations and includes such conditions as perceptual disabilities, dyslexia, dysgraphia, dyscalculia, dyspraxia and developmental aphasia.'<sup>4</sup> India's national flagship scheme for school education, [Samagra Shiksha](#), aims to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education from pre-school to senior secondary stage in accordance with SDG4, and is targeted at disadvantaged groups, such as persons from Scheduled Castes and Tribes, Muslim minorities, landless agricultural workers, children with special needs and transgender children.<sup>5</sup> In particular, Bihar is one of four states to implement residential bridge courses, which aim to improve access to regular schools for children and youth with disabilities.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, 2016 | <sup>2</sup> Saravanabhavan & Saravanabhavan, 2010 | <sup>3</sup> From Standing Outside Classrooms to Learning Within Them: Inclusive Education for Children with Learning Disabilities in India, The Bastion, retrieved May 2022 | <sup>4</sup> Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, 2016 | <sup>5</sup> Ministry of Human Resource Development, nd | <sup>6</sup> India - Inclusion chapter, Profiles Enhancing Education Reviews (PEER), <https://www.education-profiles.org>, Retrieved May 2022 (Hereafter India - Inclusion chapter, PEER, May 2022)

### Views from teachers and programme staff

AKF staff consulted also felt that inclusive education and special education is mainly thought of as referring to children with disabilities, however it can also encompass other marginalised groups such as minority language speakers. At the conceptual level it means having different groups in the same classroom and same schools learning together.

Staff ruminated on the ideas of special and inclusive education and where they differ and overlap. Special education is more targeted at children with disabilities, where there is a problem of access to education whereas inclusion is about who is already in the classroom. However, socio-cultural as well as economic differences account for marginalised groups that are also excluded from education, affecting cultural and religious minority groups that make up the superdiversity of India.

Whilst policies talk about disabilities and other disadvantaged groups, it was felt that there is inconsistency in the way they are mentioned alongside terms such as special/inclusive education, meaning policies lack precision. Some commonly used terms include '**Children with Disabilities**' (CWD), '**Children with Special Needs**' (CWSN), and '**Specially Enabled Children**' (SEC).

**'We need to normalise the range of conditions and disabilities in the community, because the way we tend to make it 'special' leads to more exclusion.'**

AKF India staff member



## Country profiles | India



## Quantifying learners with learning disabilities

Given the recent recognition of learning disabilities in the country, there is limited data available. However, UNESCO estimate that approximately 10 to 12% of the student population in India has a learning disability,<sup>7</sup>

which equates to four to six students in every average sized classroom.<sup>8</sup> Studies identify dyslexia as the most common specific learning disability, and it is believed to affect 80% of those identified as learning disabled.<sup>9</sup>



## Policy and legislative commitments

The two main laws as related to the protection of students with learning disabilities in education include the 2009 [Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act \(RTE\) Act](#), and the 2016 [Right of Persons with Disabilities \(RPWD\) Act](#). The RTE Act legislates for special protection to be provided to disadvantaged groups and children belonging to 'weaker sections', such as those whose parents or guardians earn an annual income below a minimum threshold.<sup>10</sup> The RPWD Act requires all education institutions that are funded or recognised by local authorities to provide inclusive education to children with disabilities. This includes admitting them without discrimination and ensuring school infrastructure and accommodation is accessible,

with individualised support provided as necessary.<sup>11</sup> However in terms of a child's learning, the act is unclear about diagnosis, pedagogical methods or assessment that may be appropriate for these groups.<sup>12</sup> The National Education Policy 2020 recognises that '[m]ost classrooms have children with specific learning disabilities who need continuous support.'<sup>13</sup> Importantly, the policy emphasises a need for content on how to teach children with specific disabilities to become integral to all teacher education programmes. It further alludes to plans to adopt flexible curricula and develop appropriate assessment guidelines and tools for students with learning disabilities. These recommendations are being incorporated into the national Samagra Shiksha programme.



## Teacher training provision on inclusive education

In 2019, the Rehabilitation Council of India, the body responsible for special education, recognised over 60 pre-service teacher training programmes that focus on the education of children with disabilities. In Bihar in particular, there are two training modules dedicated to raising awareness of in-service teachers of upper primary classes to integrating disabled and non-disabled learners in the classroom.<sup>14</sup>

Building on this, AKF staff confirmed that inclusive education and how teachers can address disability features in in-service and pre-service teacher training. They explained that content on inclusive education practice was introduced for teachers as an elective option for in-service training just prior to the Covid-19 pandemic. However, they had the impression that teachers generally prefer to choose subject content such as Maths or Science, over a topic

such as inclusive education. Though in-service training exposes teachers to certain types of inclusion challenges and some content on learning disabilities, in general teachers do not develop expertise in this. It was stated that there are very few teachers who have a specialisation in inclusive practice and working with students with disabilities. In private schools it is more common that teachers have attended courses on inclusive practices, however in government schools not many teachers will have been trained on this or had exposure in supporting disabled students. Overall, respondents mentioned that content on learning disabilities is not part of general teacher education, with the majority of the teacher education programmes offering optional courses only on supporting learners with disabilities.



## Country profiles | India



### Diagnosis of learning disabilities

Whilst the working definition and assessment practices used to identify learning disabilities are largely influenced by Western understanding of learning disabilities, understanding and capacity for learning disability diagnosis is growing, with the establishment in 2015 of the Dyslexia Assessment for Languages of India (DALI), the first dyslexia assessment tool contextualised to Indian needs, which is available in multiple regional languages.<sup>15</sup>

Even with these positive developments, staff pointed out that the effectiveness of the current system relies on the proficiency of teachers to be able to use and understand diagnostic tools.

AKF staff explained that there is an annual assessment process which is supposed to happen through teacher administered tools in schools. Once a learner is diagnosed, their care can then be managed by the local district, though gaining access to qualified experts is not easy for those on limited means. They felt that teachers' limited preparedness and time means that the tools are little used in practice. On top of this, little interest is shown from parents.

**'For most of the different kinds of learning disabilities most of the time they go undiagnosed.'**

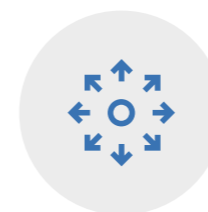
AKF India staff member

**'For a state like Bihar with a huge population it's not easy to actually administer these kinds of tests. Teachers are given assessment tools but the problem lies again in the execution of the implementation.'**

AKF India staff member

**'In country we have different kinds of tools for multiple kind of disabilities at different levels- for that we are prepared. Teachers' capacity to use those tools is where we are struggling.'**

AKF India staff member



### Current attitudes and awareness of disability

AKF staff noted that learning disabilities tend to receive little attention because they are unseen. What's more, supporting disability is frequently considered as a matter of charitable kindness, rather than a matter of human rights. In this approach, people with disabilities are considered as inferior and this only reinforces barriers to including them as part of mainstream society.

**'Learning disabilities are seen either in extremities (eg. autism, physically handicapped); or ignored completely if these are subtle and invisible.'**

AKF India staff member

Within the education system, it was felt that teachers would have limited understanding of how to implement inclusive education and effectively support those with disabilities in their classes. Whilst teachers would have some exposure to learning disabilities, this would be rather surface level knowledge that wouldn't allow them to put anything into practice.

**'My immediate experience is that teachers have very limited exposure. In the same community we have all the different groups and different kinds of disability. Knowledge of how you incorporate and involve all the learners is limited in the system, especially with the large spectrum of disabilities.'**

AKF India staff member



### Education provision, services and support for learners with disabilities

Census data from 2011 indicated that only 61% of children with disabilities aged 5-19 were attending an education institution.<sup>16</sup>

Of those attending school, most children attend mainstream schools, however a small proportion of students attend special schools run either

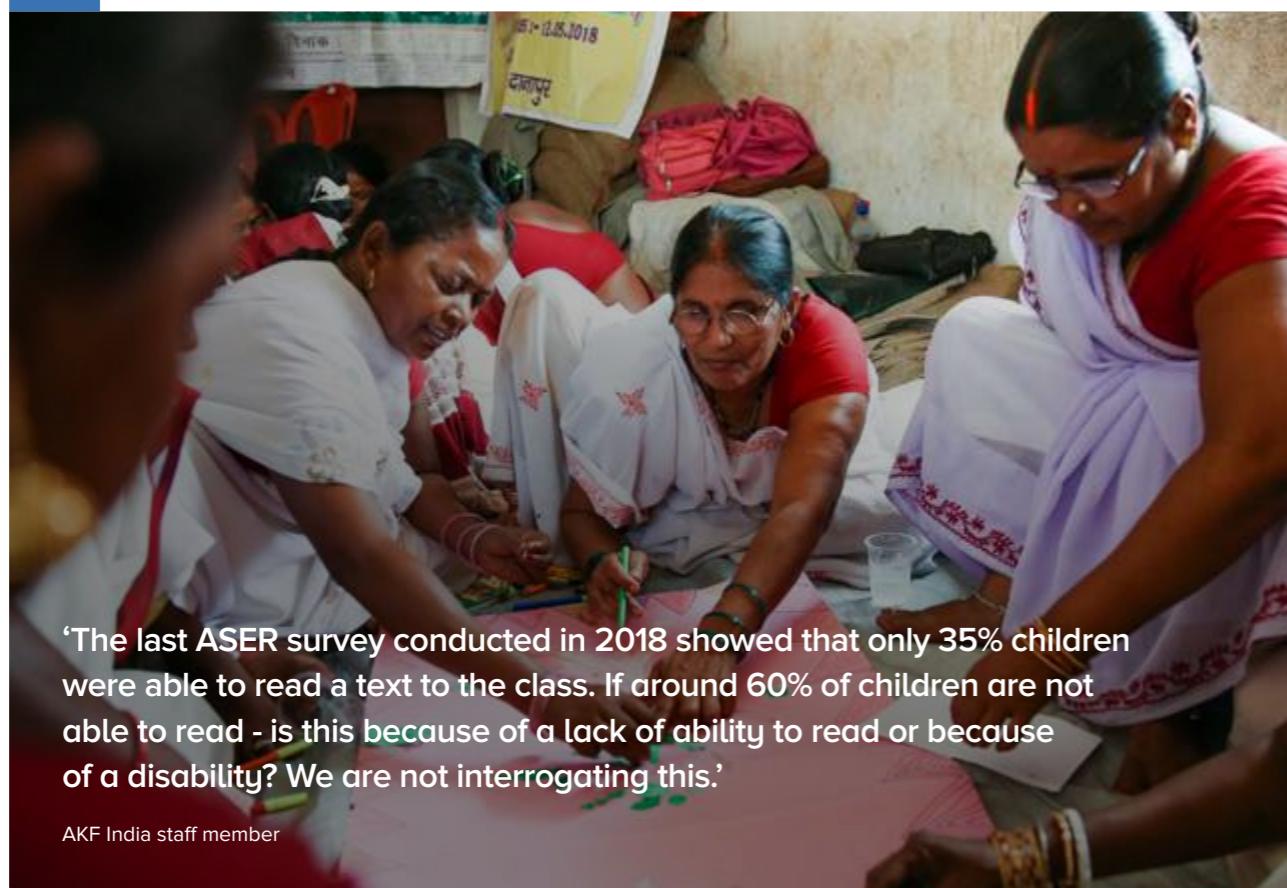
<sup>7</sup> Learning Disabilities - What, Why and How?, UNESCO Mahatma Gandhi Institute for Education of Peace and Sustainability Studies, 2022 | <sup>8</sup> From Standing Outside Classrooms to Learning Within Them: Inclusive Education for Children with Learning Disabilities in India, The Bastion, May 2022 | <sup>9</sup> Saravanabhavan & Saravanabhavan, 2010 | <sup>10</sup> Ministry of Human Resource Development, 2009 | <sup>11</sup> India - Inclusion chapter, PEER, May 2022 | <sup>12</sup> From Standing Outside Classrooms to Learning Within Them: Inclusive Education for Children with Learning Disabilities in India, The Bastion, May 2022 | <sup>13</sup> Ministry of Human Resource Development, 2020 | <sup>14</sup> India - Inclusion chapter, PEER, May 2022 | <sup>15</sup> From Standing Outside Classrooms to Learning Within Them: Inclusive Education for Children with Learning Disabilities in India, The Bastion, May 2022 | <sup>16</sup> India - Inclusion chapter, PEER, May 2022

## Country profiles | India

by private organisations, NGOs or the state. Special schools cater to different kinds of disabilities, and in some cases these include learning disabilities though these services tend to be at cost to families. Teachers in special institutions are certified by the Rehabilitation Council of India.

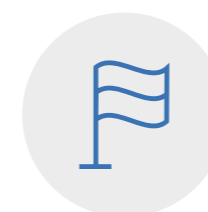
Even where children with disabilities are attending school in regular classes, staff felt that the core issue is the lack of knowledge on what is contributing to low learning levels, given that children may underperform for a variety of reasons. It was felt that where practice is failing is in the lack of ability to interrogate whether this is because of an inability to read or because of an impairment or disability.

That said, when a disability is more apparent (i.e. is a physical disability) the school will try to manage this in a sensitive way with the resources available. Even if a mainstream school wanted to create special classes this is unlikely to be possible due to a lack of space and the fact that teachers often attend to several classes at a time. In theory, it was felt that the curriculum and classroom materials had been designed to be inclusive however, in practice with teachers teaching in multigrade, multilevel classrooms they struggle to implement this or engage specifically with children with disabilities.



‘The last ASER survey conducted in 2018 showed that only 35% children were able to read a text to the class. If around 60% of children are not able to read - is this because of a lack of ability to read or because of a disability? We are not interrogating this.’

AKF India staff member



## Challenges and priority areas

Although a course on inclusive education was introduced in all general teacher education programmes in 2014<sup>17</sup>, the available evidence consistently reports that a lack of appropriate teacher training remains a barrier. Limited awareness about learners with disabilities among teachers and parents is thought to be perpetuating negative attitudes towards these learners.<sup>18</sup>

AKF staff also highlighted teacher training as a priority, calling for expertise to be built in the teaching profession to better enable teachers to identify children with invisible disabilities.

Mainly, they felt there is a need to consider inclusion in a wider sense so that the nation works to address the exclusion and the needs of all groups that are marginalised, including those least visible. Even though policies have been developed, greater efforts need to be dedicated to ensuring these can be practically implemented.

This could be achieved through awareness raising, the provision of better equipment and infrastructure, and better use of data to guide initiatives.



‘This is a topic we all know something about but it’s like an open secret. We all know something but we don’t go deep into it.’

AKF India staff member

<sup>17</sup> India - Inclusion chapter, PEER, May 2022 | <sup>18</sup> Saravanabhavan & Saravanabhavan, 2010



# Understanding Learning Differences Across Schools2030 Contexts

## References

India - Inclusion chapter, Profiles Enhancing Education Reviews (PEER), <https://www.education-profiles.org/>, Retrieved May 2022

From Standing Outside Classrooms to Learning Within Them: Inclusive Education for Children with Learning Disabilities in India. The Bastion. (2022). Retrieved May 2022, from <https://thebastion.co.in/politics-and/from-standing-outside-classrooms-to-learning-within-them-inclusive-education-for-children-with-learning-disabilities-in-india/>

Learning Disabilities - What, Why and How?, UNESCO Mahatma Gandhi Institute for Education of Peace and

Sustainability Studies. (2022). Retrieved May 2022, from <https://mgiep.unesco.org/article/learning-disabilities-what-why-and-how>

Ministry of Human Resource Development. (nd). Samagra Shiksha An Integrated Scheme for School Education Framework for Implementation (draft document). [https://samagra.education.gov.in/docs/Framework\\_IISE%20\\_F.pdf](https://samagra.education.gov.in/docs/Framework_IISE%20_F.pdf)

Ministry of Human Resource Development. (2009). The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act. [https://www.education.gov.in/sites/upload\\_files/mhrd/files/upload\\_document/rte.pdf](https://www.education.gov.in/sites/upload_files/mhrd/files/upload_document/rte.pdf)

Ministry of Human Resource Development. (2020). National Education Policy 2020. [https://www.education.gov.in/sites/upload\\_files/mhrd/files/NEP\\_Final\\_English\\_0.pdf](https://www.education.gov.in/sites/upload_files/mhrd/files/NEP_Final_English_0.pdf)

Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment. (2016). The Rights of Persons with Disabilities (RPWD) Act. [https://legislative.gov.in/sites/default/files/A2016-49\\_1.pdf](https://legislative.gov.in/sites/default/files/A2016-49_1.pdf)

Saravanabhavan, S., & Saravanabhavan, R. C. (2010). Knowledge of learning disability among pre-and in-service teachers in India. International Journal of Special Education, 25(3), 132-138. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ90929>