A Study of Inclusive, Equitable, and Quality Education in India

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ABSTRACT

Inclusive, equitable, and quality education is central to the achievement of Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4) and to the development of a socially just society. India has established an extensive policy framework through the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009, the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016, Samagra Shiksha, the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, and programmes focused on foundational learning and digital education. However, the existence of policy commitments does not by itself ensure that all learners can access, participate in, complete, and benefit from education on equal terms. This study examines the relationship among inclusion, equity, and educational quality in India through a qualitative documentary review of legislation, policy documents, official education statistics, national learning-assessment material, and selected institutional reports. The analysis is organized around three connected dimensions: educational access and participation; equitable learning conditions and support; and learning, progression, and completion outcomes. Evidence from UDISE+ 2023–24 indicates that 53.9% of schools reported internet availability and 50.9% reported a functional computer facility for pedagogical purposes. The same report recorded ramps for children with special needs in 77.1% of schools, while only 32.2% reported functional CWSN-friendly toilets. The national figures also conceal substantial state-level variation: Arunachal Pradesh reported internet availability in 30.5% of schools and ramps in 27.1% of schools. PARAKH Rashtriya Sarvekshan 2024, which assessed more than 21 lakh students across 781 districts, provides a further national evidence base for examining learning competencies. The review finds that India's policy architecture is comparatively broad, but its transformative effect depends on implementation capacity, accessible infrastructure, teacher preparedness, appropriate learning support, digital inclusion, and disaggregated monitoring. The study argues that inclusion, equity, and quality should be treated as mutually reinforcing dimensions rather than separate policy objectives. It recommends a measurable, context-sensitive approach that links resources and institutional processes with learner participation and learning outcomes.

Keywords: Inclusive Education; Educational Equity; Quality Education; SDG 4; NEP 2020; India; Documentary Review

INTRODUCTION

Education is both a fundamental human right and an important means of individual development, social participation, and national progress. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development identifies education as a central condition for reducing inequality and expanding human capabilities. SDG 4 calls on countries to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all (United Nations, 2015). The goal is broader than school enrolment: it concerns whether learners can enter education, participate meaningfully, remain in the system, complete relevant stages, and achieve worthwhile learning outcomes.

India's education system operates at an exceptional scale and serves learners from diverse social, linguistic, economic, geographical, and cultural backgrounds. UDISE+ 2023–24 reported approximately 14.72 lakh schools, more than 98 lakh teachers, and nearly 24.8 crore students from the foundational to secondary levels (Ministry of Education, 2024). Such scale creates major opportunities for universal provision, but it

also makes equitable implementation complex. Differences in household income, gender, caste and tribal location, disability, language, school management, remoteness, and access to technology can shape learners' educational experiences.

The policy framework has developed through constitutional commitments, the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009 (RTE Act), the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016 (RPwD Act), Samagra Shiksha, and NEP 2020. NEP 2020 explicitly identifies bridging social-category gaps in access, participation, and learning outcomes as a continuing priority. It also recognizes socio-economically disadvantaged groups and calls for an education system in which no learner is deprived of opportunities because of circumstances of birth or background (Ministry of Education, 2020).

Nevertheless, a distinction must be maintained between policy intention and educational experience. A school may be formally available but physically inaccessible to a learner with a disability. A child may be enrolled but attend irregularly because of poverty, transport barriers, language differences, care responsibilities, or safety concerns. A learner may complete a grade without attaining the expected competencies. Similarly, the availability of a computer or internet connection at school does not establish that every learner has reliable access to a device, accessible content, connectivity at home, or the skills needed to use digital resources.

The present study therefore examines inclusive, equitable, and quality education as an interconnected policy and implementation challenge. It considers national-level evidence while drawing attention to state-level diversity, with a limited illustration from Arunachal Pradesh. The purpose is not to claim that one national indicator can represent every learner's experience, but to identify what available documentary evidence reveals and where further disaggregated investigation is required.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE AND POLICY CONTEXT

Inclusion as access, participation, and achievement

Contemporary approaches to inclusion move beyond the narrow idea of placing learners from disadvantaged groups in ordinary schools. Inclusion requires the identification and reduction of barriers to presence, participation, learning, and achievement. UNESCO's Global Education Monitoring Report 2020 emphasizes that all means all and examines how education systems can respond to diversity rather than treating difference as a reason for exclusion (UNESCO, 2020). This perspective is relevant to India because formal admission does not necessarily remove barriers related to disability, language, poverty, gender, social identity, or geographical isolation.

The RPwD Act, 2016 gives this principle a legal dimension. Section 16 places duties on educational institutions to provide inclusive education, ensure non-discriminatory admission, make buildings and facilities accessible, provide reasonable accommodation and individualized support, and monitor participation, progress, and completion for students with disabilities (Government of India, 2016). The Act therefore makes clear that inclusion is not limited to physical admission; it also concerns accessible environments, appropriate communication, learning support, and educational progress.

Equity and differentiated support

Equality generally refers to equal treatment or equal entitlement, whereas equity recognizes that learners may require different forms or levels of support to achieve fair opportunities. A uniform allocation of resources may reproduce disadvantage when learners begin from unequal circumstances. Equity-oriented education therefore considers the distribution of teachers, learning materials, accessible facilities, scholarships, transport, assistive technologies, language support, and remedial opportunities. NEP 2020 identifies socio-economically disadvantaged groups and emphasizes targeted measures to improve access, participation, and learning outcomes (Ministry of Education, 2020).

Equity also requires attention to overlapping disadvantage. A girl with a disability living in a remote tribal community may face barriers that cannot be understood by examining gender, disability, or location separately. Such intersectional conditions call for locally informed planning and disaggregated data. National averages are useful for system-level monitoring, but they may conceal sharp differences among states, districts, school types, and learner groups.

Quality as learning and supportive educational conditions

Quality education cannot be measured solely by school buildings, enrolment, or teacher numbers. It includes qualified and supported teachers, relevant curriculum, inclusive pedagogy, safe and accessible learning environments, formative assessment, foundational literacy and numeracy, and meaningful progression. SDG 4 includes indicators relating to minimum proficiency in reading and mathematics, completion rates, early childhood development, school facilities, and qualified teachers (United Nations, n.d.). These indicators demonstrate that quality is multidimensional.

The PARAKH Rashtriya Sarvekshan 2024 provides a recent national assessment reference. Conducted across Grades 3, 6, and 9, it assessed 21,15,022 students in 74,229 schools across 781 districts and collected questionnaire responses from 2,70,424 teachers and school leaders (NCERT, 2025). Its scale provides valuable system-level evidence, although assessment results must be interpreted alongside contextual factors such as language, school resources, household conditions, and the support available to learners with disabilities.

Indian policy and programme literature

The RTE Act, 2009 establishes the legal entitlement to free and compulsory elementary education for children in the constitutionally specified age group. The RPwD Act, 2016 strengthens the obligations concerning inclusive education and reasonable accommodation for children with disabilities. Samagra Shiksha provides a programme framework for school education and includes support for children with special needs, such as identification and assessment, aids and appliances, Braille and large-print materials, therapeutic services, assistive devices, teacher training, and learning materials (Department of School Education and Literacy, n.d.).

NEP 2020 provides a broader policy vision for equitable and inclusive education across school and higher education. NIPUN Bharat, launched in 2021 under Samagra Shiksha, focuses on foundational literacy and numeracy, with the stated goal of enabling children to attain foundational competencies by the end of Grade 3 (Ministry of Education, 2021). Digital initiatives such as DIKSHA and PM eVIDYA can widen access to learning resources, but their contribution to equity depends on connectivity, device availability, language accessibility, disability accessibility, and teachers' ability to integrate technology into instruction.

The literature and policy framework point to a common conclusion: educational inclusion, equity, and quality are interdependent. Yet policy documents often state broad goals, while monitoring systems may report separate indicators for enrolment, infrastructure, teacher availability, and learning. The analytical task is to connect these indicators and examine whether institutional inputs are translated into meaningful participation and learning.

Research Gap and Rationale

The original manuscript proposed that inclusion, equity, and quality are often examined separately. That claim is too broad to establish an original contribution without a systematic mapping of the full research literature. The present revision therefore defines a narrower and more defensible gap. Indian policy documents and official datasets provide substantial information on legal entitlements, school resources, digital facilities, disability-related infrastructure, and learning assessment. However, these sources are often presented through different reporting systems and are not always interpreted together as a connected pathway from policy commitment to implementation conditions and learner outcomes.

The specific gap addressed here is the need for an integrated documentary analysis that places (a) policy commitments, (b) educational inputs and implementation processes, and (c) participation and learning outcomes within one analytical framework. The study also highlights the importance of state-level variation by using selected UDISE+ indicators for Arunachal Pradesh as an illustration. It does not claim to provide a comprehensive state comparison or a causal evaluation of policy effectiveness.

Objectives of the Study

- To examine the conceptual relationship among inclusive education, educational equity, and quality education in the context of SDG 4.
- To analyse how major Indian education laws, policies, and programmes address access, participation, support, and learning outcomes.
- To review selected official evidence on school infrastructure, digital facilities, disability-related accessibility, and learning assessment.
- To identify implementation challenges that may prevent policy commitments from translating into equitable educational experiences.
- To suggest evidence-linked and context-sensitive measures for strengthening inclusive, equitable, and quality education in India.

Research Questions

- How do India's major education laws, policies, and programmes address the interconnected dimensions of inclusion, equity, and quality?
- What do selected official indicators reveal about school resources, digital access, disability-related infrastructure, and learning assessment?
- What implementation barriers may limit the translation of policy commitments into meaningful participation and learning?
- What measures can strengthen the relationship between educational inputs, inclusive processes, and equitable learning outcomes?

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research design

The study adopts a qualitative documentary review with descriptive analysis of selected secondary sources. It is not presented as a systematic review or a meta-analysis. The documentary approach is appropriate because the research questions concern the content of national policy commitments, the pattern of selected official indicators, and the relationship between implementation conditions and educational outcomes.

Scope and documentary sources

The review focuses primarily on the period 2009–2025, covering the RTE Act, the RPwD Act, NEP 2020, Samagra Shiksha, NIPUN Bharat, UDISE+ 2023–24, PARAKH Rashtriya Sarvekshan 2024, ASER 2024, and relevant SDG 4 and UNESCO material. The documentary corpus was purposively selected for (a) official or institutional authority, (b) direct relevance to inclusion, equity, quality, or learning, (c) availability of identifiable publication details, and (d) usefulness for answering the research questions. Government policy documents and official statistical reports were prioritized for factual claims.

Targeted searches were conducted through Government of India and Ministry of Education portals, NCERT/PARAKH, the Samagra Shiksha portal, ASER Centre, UNESCO, and United Nations SDG resources. Search expressions included combinations of the terms "inclusive education India", "equitable quality education", "SDG 4 India", "UDISE+ 2023–24", "school infrastructure", "children with special needs", "digital access in schools", "NEP 2020", "PARAKH Rashtriya Sarvekshan 2024", and

"foundational learning". This was a targeted documentary search rather than a database-based systematic search.

Inclusion and exclusion criteria

- Included: legislation, national policy documents, official statistical reports, national learning-assessment reports, and institutional publications directly relevant to Indian school education and SDG 4.
- Included: documents with identifiable issuing institutions, publication years, and traceable titles or official webpages.
- Excluded: incomplete or unverifiable references, entries containing missing journal or publisher details, duplicate-looking citations that could not be distinguished, and publications whose relevance to the research questions was not established.
- Excluded: unsupported numerical claims and data that could not be traced to an identifiable source.

Analytical procedure

The selected documents were read in relation to the four research questions. Relevant information was organized under five analytical categories: (1) legal and policy commitments; (2) access, participation, and progression; (3) equity-related support and disability accessibility; (4) school resources and digital access; and (5) learning assessment and outcomes. The categories were compared across policy and statistical sources. Findings were then grouped into themes concerning the policy architecture, the gap between infrastructure availability and functional inclusion, the uneven distribution of resources, the need to interpret learning outcomes in context, and the importance of monitoring implementation.

Because the review is documentary and descriptive, it does not establish causal relationships between a particular programme and changes in student achievement. The study also does not report a PRISMA flow diagram or a count of all records screened, because the search was not conducted as a registered systematic review. These boundaries are stated to avoid overstating the methodological design.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The study treats inclusion, equity, and quality as mutually reinforcing dimensions. Inclusion concerns whether learners are present, accepted, able to participate, and supported in common educational settings. Equity concerns whether resources and support respond to different needs and barriers. Quality concerns whether the educational experience enables meaningful learning, progression, well-being, and completion. Inclusion without adequate support may result in physical presence without participation; equity without attention to learning may distribute inputs without improving outcomes; and quality measured only through average achievement may conceal the exclusion of particular groups.

Framework level	Key elements	Illustrative indicators/questions
Policy and system inputs	Legal entitlements; public finance; school availability; teachers; accessible infrastructure; assistive technology; digital resources	Are rights and resources provided? Are schools physically and digitally accessible?
Implementation processes	Inclusive pedagogy; reasonable accommodation; language support; teacher development; counselling; family/community participation; monitoring	Can learners participate meaningfully? Are teaching and assessment adapted to diverse needs?

Immediate outputs	Enrolment; attendance; retention; access to learning materials; use of support services; participation in classroom activities	Who enters, attends, remains, and participates? Which groups are underserved?
Educational outcomes	Foundational learning; grade progression; completion; achievement; well-being; transition to further education	Do learners achieve relevant competencies and complete educational stages equitably?
Feedback and accountability	Disaggregated data; school review; grievance redressal; local planning; public reporting	Are gaps identified and corrected at school, district, and state levels?

Analytical pathway: Policy commitments and resources → inclusive institutional processes → learner access, participation, and retention → learning, progression, and completion outcomes → monitoring and corrective action.

The framework is used as an organizing model for documentary evidence. It is not a tested causal model. Its purpose is to prevent the analysis from treating enrolment, infrastructure, inclusion, and learning as interchangeable measures.

RESULTS AND FINDINGS

A broad policy architecture exists, but policy instruments perform different functions

The reviewed policy documents indicate that India's education framework includes legal entitlements, rights-based obligations, centrally sponsored programme support, curricular and pedagogical reform, and targeted foundational-learning initiatives. These instruments should not be treated as interchangeable. The RTE Act establishes a statutory entitlement to elementary education. The RPwD Act specifies duties and support requirements for inclusive education for children with disabilities. Samagra Shiksha provides programme-based support and resources. NEP 2020 sets a wider policy direction, while NIPUN Bharat focuses on foundational literacy and numeracy.

Policy / programme	Primary function	Relevance to the framework	Implementation question
RTE Act, 2009	Legal entitlement to free and compulsory elementary education	Access, enrolment, and elementary-stage participation	Are children enrolled, attending regularly, retained, and supported to complete elementary education?
RPwD Act, 2016	Rights-based duties for inclusive education and reasonable accommodation	Accessibility, support, participation, progress, and completion for learners with disabilities	Are buildings, teaching, assessment, communication, and support services accessible in practice?
Samagra Shiksha	Integrated school-education programme and resource support	School quality, teacher development, infrastructure, and support for CWSN	Are resources timely, adequate, functional, and matched to local needs?
NEP 2020	National policy	System-wide reform across	Are policy goals translated

	direction for equitable, inclusive, holistic education	access, pedagogy, teacher education, and learning outcomes	into state plans, budgets, and measurable indicators?
NIPUN Bharat	Mission for foundational literacy and numeracy	Early learning and foundational competencies	Are children attaining grade-appropriate competencies, and are those lagging behind receiving support?
DIKSHA / PM eVIDYA	Digital content and technology-supported learning	Access to learning resources and continuity of learning	Do learners have devices, connectivity, accessible content, and teacher guidance?

The policy architecture is therefore broad in scope. However, the existence of a programme or legal provision is not evidence that every school has implemented it effectively. Implementation depends on funding, local administrative capacity, trained personnel, procurement, maintenance, monitoring, and the ability to adapt support to learner needs.

School-level infrastructure and digital access remain uneven

UDISE+ 2023–24 provides useful evidence on school facilities. At the national level, 53.9% of schools reported internet availability and 50.9% reported a functional computer facility for pedagogical purposes. These indicators show that digital infrastructure was not universal at the time covered by the report. They also require careful interpretation: the presence of an internet connection or computer does not reveal the quality of connectivity, the number of devices per learner, affordability of home access, accessibility of content, or actual frequency of classroom use (Ministry of Education, 2024).

The same dataset indicates a notable gap between basic physical access and more specific disability-related facilities. Ramps for children with special needs were reported by 77.1% of schools, but functional CWSN-friendly toilets were reported by 32.2%. A ramp alone does not make a school fully accessible: routes, classrooms, toilets, drinking-water points, laboratories, libraries, transport, signage, and emergency procedures also matter. The difference between ramp availability and functional accessible toilets illustrates why single-facility indicators should not be treated as a complete measure of inclusion.

Selected UDISE+ indicator (2023–24)	India	Arunachal Pradesh	Analytical significance
Schools with internet facility	53.9%	30.5%	Indicates unequal availability of school-level connectivity; does not measure quality or household access.
Functional computer facility for pedagogical purposes	50.9%	37.8%	Shows that functional teaching-use computer facilities were not universal.
Schools with ramps for CWSN	77.1%	27.1%	Highlights a substantial state-level difference in one aspect of physical accessibility.
Schools with functional CWSN-friendly toilets	32.2%	7.6%	Shows that accessible sanitation is a major concern and that ramp availability alone is insufficient.

Source: Ministry of Education, UDISE+ 2023–24, Tables 7.10–7.13. Percentages are reported by the source and refer to school-level facilities, not the proportion of children who personally have access to or use those facilities. The Arunachal Pradesh figures are presented as an illustration of state-level variation, not as a complete assessment of the state's education system.

The figures also caution against assuming uniform implementation across India. For a geographically diverse state such as Arunachal Pradesh, distance, terrain, settlement patterns, connectivity, school size, and availability of specialist personnel may influence the cost and feasibility of service delivery. These contextual factors require district-level investigation rather than inference from national averages.

Learning assessment provides evidence beyond enrolment

PARAKH Rashtriya Sarvekshan 2024 assessed students in Grades 3, 6, and 9 across 36 States and Union Territories. The national report records 21,15,022 students from 74,229 schools in 781 districts, with questionnaire responses from 2,70,424 teachers and school leaders (NCERT, 2025). The scale of the survey makes it a valuable source for understanding learning competencies and contextual factors across the school system.

The survey is important to this study because it shifts attention from the number of children enrolled to what students are learning at key stages. However, large-scale assessment results should not be interpreted as a complete account of quality or inclusion. Test performance must be read alongside school resources, language of instruction, teacher support, disability accommodations, socio-economic background, and opportunities for participation. Aggregate results may conceal the experiences of small or underrepresented learner groups.

ASER 2024 is another relevant source because it provides household-based evidence on enrolment and foundational learning in rural India. It should be used alongside administrative data rather than treated as a substitute for it. UDISE+ primarily provides school-system information, while ASER uses a different survey design and assessment approach. Their indicators should not be combined as if they were measured through identical methods (ASER Centre, 2025).

Inclusion requires more than physical placement

The legal and programme documents reviewed in this study emphasize accessibility, reasonable accommodation, assistive devices, learning materials, therapeutic support, teacher preparation, and individualized support. These provisions suggest that inclusion is a whole-school responsibility. A learner may be admitted to a mainstream school yet remain excluded from classroom discussion, laboratory work, sports, assessment, digital content, or school events if the environment and teaching practices are not adapted.

The UDISE+ data on ramps and accessible toilets provide an example of how physical access can be measured, but they do not measure the full quality of inclusion. Further indicators are needed on the availability of special educators, accessible textbooks, sign-language or communication support, assistive technology, individualized educational planning, teacher competence, reasonable accommodation during assessment, and learner-reported experiences.

Equity requires attention to intersecting disadvantages

The reviewed policy framework recognizes disadvantaged groups, but an integrated analysis must consider how barriers overlap. Poverty may restrict transport, nutrition, learning materials, and digital access. Gender may interact with safety, household responsibilities, sanitation, and social expectations. Disability may interact with remoteness, language, poverty, and the availability of specialist services. Tribal and linguistic-minority learners may experience a mismatch between home language and classroom language. These conditions can compound one another.

A national policy can establish a common entitlement, but the support required to make that entitlement meaningful may differ across districts and learner groups. Equity-oriented planning therefore requires data disaggregated, where appropriate and ethically collected, by gender, disability, social group, location, school management, and socio-economic context. Data protection and confidentiality must be maintained, particularly for small or vulnerable populations.

DISCUSSION

The findings reinforce the central proposition of the study: inclusion, equity, and quality should be analysed as a connected system. The policy review demonstrates that India has legal and programme instruments addressing access, disability inclusion, school resources, foundational learning, and broader educational reform. Yet the UDISE+ indicators show that key facilities remain unevenly available. The contrast between the reported national availability of ramps and functional CWSN-friendly toilets illustrates that a school may satisfy one visible accessibility measure while lacking other facilities necessary for independent participation.

The digital indicators raise a similar issue. Digital learning can expand access to content, teacher resources, and continuity of learning, but digital provision can also reproduce inequality if learners differ in device ownership, connectivity, language access, disability accessibility, or digital skills. Therefore, digital inclusion must be assessed through a chain of conditions: infrastructure, affordability, accessibility, relevance, teacher competence, and actual learner use.

The learning-assessment evidence adds another dimension. PARAKH Rashtriya Sarvekshan 2024 provides a large-scale picture of competencies at three school stages. Such evidence is necessary because enrolment and infrastructure do not guarantee learning. However, quality cannot be reduced to test scores alone. A fair assessment of quality should also consider student well-being, classroom participation, inclusive assessment, progression, completion, and the extent to which schools support learners who begin from unequal circumstances.

The state-level illustration from Arunachal Pradesh shows why national averages must be interpreted cautiously. UDISE+ 2023–24 reports lower percentages for selected digital and disability-related facilities in Arunachal Pradesh than the national figures. These differences do not, by themselves, explain the causes or establish the quality of implementation. They do, however, indicate the need for state- and district-specific planning, especially where geography and settlement patterns affect infrastructure and service delivery.

The analysis also clarifies the distinction between policy effectiveness and policy implementation. This documentary review can identify policy provisions, selected resource indicators, and plausible implementation gaps.

It cannot establish that a particular programme caused a change in learning outcomes, because such a claim would require an appropriate evaluation design and comparable outcome data. A future empirical study could combine school-level observations, teacher interviews, learner experiences, and district-level indicators to examine how policy is experienced in practice.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Strengthen implementation accountability

The Ministry of Education, State Education Departments, Samagra Shiksha authorities, and district administrations should translate broad policy goals into annual, costed implementation plans. Each plan should specify responsible agencies, timelines, budget allocations, and measurable indicators for access, attendance, retention, accessibility, teacher support, and learning. Monitoring should distinguish between facilities reported as available and facilities that are functional and usable.

Develop a comprehensive accessibility audit

State and district authorities should conduct school-level accessibility audits covering routes to school, entrances, ramps and handrails, classrooms, toilets, drinking-water points, libraries, laboratories, playgrounds, transport, signage, emergency arrangements, and digital platforms. The audit should include consultation with learners with disabilities and their families. Corrective plans should prioritize functional accessible toilets, safe routes, reasonable accommodation, assistive technology, and accessible learning materials.

Strengthen teacher preparation for inclusive pedagogy

Teacher education institutions, SCERTs, DIETs, and school leadership structures should provide continuing professional development in differentiated instruction, universal design for learning, classroom adaptation, inclusive assessment, disability awareness, multilingual pedagogy, early identification of learning difficulties, and referral to specialist support. Training should be practice-based and followed by mentoring, classroom observation, and professional learning communities.

Bridge the digital divide through a multi-dimensional approach

Digital inclusion plans should separately monitor reliable connectivity, functional devices, electricity, accessible and multilingual content, teacher digital competence, learner access outside school, and technical maintenance. Offline and low-bandwidth alternatives should remain available. Assistive technologies and accessible formats should be included in procurement and content-development processes rather than added only after a learner encounters a barrier.

Improve foundational learning and targeted academic support

Schools should use classroom-based formative assessment and system-level assessment evidence to identify learning needs early. NIPUN Bharat implementation should be supported by age- and grade-appropriate teaching materials, multilingual resources where required, teacher mentoring, and structured support for children who are not meeting expected competencies. Assessment results should guide support rather than stigmatize learners or schools.

Adopt intersectional and locally responsive planning

District plans should identify groups facing overlapping barriers, including girls with disabilities, children in remote communities, first-generation learners, linguistic minorities, and children from economically disadvantaged households. Local plans should be based on school mapping, transport and accessibility audits, community consultation, and appropriately disaggregated data. In geographically difficult areas, resource allocation should account for higher delivery and maintenance costs.

Strengthen community participation and grievance redressal

School Management Committees, parents, local bodies, disability organizations, and community groups should participate in identifying barriers and monitoring school improvement. Learners and families should have accessible channels to report discrimination, inaccessible facilities, bullying, denial of reasonable accommodation, and exclusion from school activities. Grievance mechanisms should provide time-bound responses and protect confidentiality.

Link recommendations to measurable indicators

Priority	Suggested monitoring indicators	Responsible level
Access and	Enrolment, attendance, transition, retention, and completion disaggregated by relevant learner	School, block, district, state

participation	groups	
Disability inclusion	Functional accessible toilets, accessible routes, accommodation plans, assistive support, participation and completion	School and district; state oversight
Teacher capacity	Teachers receiving practice-based training; mentoring frequency; use of inclusive assessment and differentiated instruction	SCERT/DIET, school leadership, district
Digital inclusion	Functional connectivity and devices; accessible content; learner use; offline alternatives; teacher digital competence	School, district, state
Learning quality	Foundational literacy and numeracy; stage-wise competencies; progression; support provided to learners below expected levels	School and assessment authorities
Accountability	Budget utilization; audit completion; corrective actions closed; grievances resolved within defined timelines	District and state

Limitations of the Study

The study has several limitations. First, it relies on secondary documentary sources and does not include primary fieldwork, classroom observation, interviews, or learner testimony. Second, the documentary search was targeted and purposive, not a registered systematic review; therefore, it cannot claim exhaustive coverage of all relevant scholarship. Third, official datasets differ in purpose, coverage, definitions, and methods. UDISE+ school-level facility indicators, household-based ASER estimates, and PARAKH learning-assessment results should not be directly combined without methodological qualification. Fourth, the selected UDISE+ indicators describe reported school facilities and do not establish whether each facility is fully functional, accessible to every learner, or regularly used. Fifth, national and state-level figures can conceal substantial district-level and group-level variation. Finally, the descriptive documentary design cannot establish causal effects of individual policies or programmes on student outcomes.

CONCLUSION

This study examined inclusive, equitable, and quality education in India through an integrated documentary framework. The review shows that India has established a substantial policy architecture through the RTE Act, the RPwD Act, Samagra Shiksha, NEP 2020, and initiatives such as NIPUN Bharat. These instruments address different but connected dimensions of educational opportunity, including legal access, disability inclusion, school resources, teacher development, and learning outcomes.

The selected official evidence also demonstrates why policy commitments must be assessed against implementation conditions. UDISE+ 2023–24 reports that just over half of schools had internet availability and functional pedagogical computer facilities, while the gap between ramps and functional CWSN-friendly toilets indicates that accessibility is multi-dimensional. State-level figures for Arunachal Pradesh illustrate the danger of relying exclusively on national averages. PARAKH Rashtriya Sarvekshan 2024 adds an important learning-outcome perspective by assessing students at Grades 3, 6, and 9 across the country.

The study's principal contribution is an analytical framework that connects policy and resources with inclusive processes, learner participation, and educational outcomes. It argues that inclusion is not achieved by enrolment alone, equity is not achieved by identical treatment, and quality is not demonstrated by

infrastructure or test scores in isolation. A genuinely inclusive and equitable education system must ensure that learners can access school, participate with dignity, receive the support they need, learn meaningfully, and complete educational stages.

Achieving this objective requires coordinated action by the Union and State Governments, educational institutions, teachers, teacher-education institutions, local authorities, families, and communities. Future research should undertake district-level empirical studies, particularly in geographically diverse states, to examine how policy provisions are implemented and experienced by learners from different backgrounds. Such work would complement national documentary analysis and support more responsive educational planning.

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