



Strengthening Inclusive Education: Unraveling Prerequisites for Children with Intellectual Disabilities

Dhruba Prasad Niure

dhrubapn@gmail.com

Reader, Central Department of Education, TU, Kirtipur

Madhav Kumar Shrestha

Sanothimi Campus, T.U.

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Abstract

This article highlights the prerequisites that need to be considered to provide inclusive education to children with intellectual disabilities. Educating these children in inclusive settings not only ensures quality instructional services but also prepares them for adult life in the future. Nevertheless, a number of factors, such as government policies, resource availability, teacher attitudes, community support, and the quality of accessible learning materials, have a tremendous impact on ensuring their inclusion in education. Neglecting the better education of these children may lead to societal burdens, and inclusive education can help students coexist more effectively in broader social contexts as adults. Since students with intellectual disabilities often face challenges in processing and expressing information due to their unique learning characteristics, they must be treated differently using evidence-based practices. Accommodations and modifications in the curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment should be made based on their learning profiles. Teachers should have high expectations and provide quality support for all students to ensure their access to the general curriculum. Educational services for children with intellectual disabilities in Nepal reveal a significant policy-practice gap. Though there are policy provisions for providing inclusive education to all children, children with intellectual disabilities are often segregated, leading to inadequate support and poor education quality. This situation deprives them of their right to study alongside typically developing peers.

Introduction

The Constitution of Nepal guarantees equal rights to receive free and compulsory basic education for all children, including those with intellectual disabilities (Nepal Law Commission, 2015) irrespective of their class, caste, gender, cognitive abilities, or learning pace. To uphold this constitutional provision, the Nepal government has introduced various acts, policies, and legislation over the past decades (Thapaliya, 2016). As a result of these initiatives, approximately 17,000 students with intellectual disabilities, out of the 45,885 (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2012), are receiving formal education through 14 special, and 122 resource classes (Ministry of Education, 2017). Expanding educational institutions to include children with intellectual disabilities has positively impacted their access to basic education. However, there is a need to reevaluate the efforts of service providers that they made to provide education to students with intellectual disabilities based on their unique needs, learning paces, abilities, and styles (Human Rights Watch, 2018). These students are expected to share a common learning environment in general educational settings, but they cannot fully benefit from the general education curriculum without accommodating and modifying it as per their distinct needs. Curriculum differentiation has been proven effective in making curricula accessible to these students, as it allows teachers to customize curricular goals, content, instructional processes, evaluation methods, and learning environments to meet their specific learning needs. Academic research shows that these students benefit more from inclusive educational settings than segregated ones because a continuum of services addresses the diverse needs of all learners (Gallagher & Bennett, 2013; Mastropieri & Scruggs, 2018). Students with mild intellectual disabilities are more

benefitted from general education classroom as compared to those with severe and profound types of intellectual disabilities.

Inclusive education is a crucial approach to providing quality education to all children, including those with disabilities, in regular classroom settings. It embodies a vision and practice of welcoming, valuing, empowering, and supporting students from diverse socio-economic backgrounds (Causton & Tracy-Bronson, 2015). Inclusive education is a form of social justice in education, seeking fair and equitable educational practices for all students by eliminating discrimination and prejudice based on specific characteristics (Zelta, 2016). It promotes the active participation of all students, including those with intellectual disabilities, in everyday school activities to ensure quality education (National Council for Special Education, 2014). Inclusive education demands that the educational system adapts to the unique needs of children rather than expecting students to fit into a conventionally rooted system (Zelta, 2016). Segregated educational practices restrict the rights of children with disabilities and limit their opportunities for self-fulfillment (CERID, 2004). To strengthen the learning of students with intellectual disabilities, different types of educational interventions should be implemented within inclusive learning environments.

Inclusive education is a process that aims at increasing the participation of students who are unrepresented or underrepresented in the education system. It serves as a means to ensure the right to education for all children by accommodating educational programs to their special learning needs (Curriculum Development Center, 2007). Students with intellectual disabilities constitute a diverse group, ranging from mild to profound levels

of severity (Kirk et al., 2015; Mastropieri & Scruggs, 2018). They typically exhibit deficits in cognitive functioning and adaptive behavior, which ultimately affect their educational performance (Richards et al., 2015; Shaw & Jankowska, 2018). These students often struggle with memory, learning, motivation, generalization, self-care skills, social relationships, communication, and meta-cognitive skills (Algozzine & Ysseldyke, 2006; Brue & Wilmschurst, 2016). Consequently, they cannot access the general education curriculum without appropriate accommodations and modifications. The severity of intellectual disabilities varies, ranging from mild to profound, and students require intermittent, limited, extensive, or pervasive supports based on their individual differences to maximize their academic and functional growth (Heward, 2013). Importantly, these supports under inclusive educational setting are more beneficial than under segregated educational setting.

Cognitive, communicative, and social deficits limit the ability of students with intellectual disabilities to cope with the academic and social challenges of school education (Hallahan et al., 2012). Some students may not achieve mastery of academic curriculum, necessitating the development and implementation of functional curricula to help them become more independent in their daily lives, similar to their peers without disabilities (Heward, 2013). In response to these challenges, various educational programs, including additional supports from special schools and resource centers, have been offered to students with intellectual disabilities within the formal education system in Nepal. While the government has promoted inclusive education policies for school education, pull-out services have been provided to children with intellectual disabilities through special schools and

resource classes (Human Rights Watch, 2011). Considering the significant differences in cognitive skills, learnability, social skills, and learning paces between students with intellectual disabilities and typically developing learners, educational services designed for the latter may not benefit the former without appropriate modifications and accommodations. In Nepal, students with intellectual disabilities, regardless of the severity of their disability, are expected to follow the same lessons, neglecting their individual learning differences, which has led to unsatisfactory performance in classrooms, with many students staying in the same grade for years (Human Rights Watch, 2011). Therefore, educational services within an inclusive learning environment is vital to maximize the learning of students with intellectual disabilities.

No two students are alike despite possessing similar type of disability, intellectual disabilities for examples. Therefore, a single curriculum, identical instructional activities, and uniform assessment procedures do not cater to the diverse needs and learning styles of all students (Burkett, 2013). Children with intellectual disabilities have the same rights to education as their typically developing peers of the same age. However, these children exhibit significant differences in their cognitive abilities, including challenges such as poor memory, slower learning rates, attention problems, difficulty in generalizing learned knowledge and skills, and limited motivation (Heward, 2013; Shaw & Jankowska, 2018). Consequently, they may struggle to master the standard school curriculum that their typically developing peers navigate more easily. The standard curriculum therefore may not adequately cater to the specific needs of children with intellectual disabilities, necessitating notable accommodations, modifications, and

alterations in curricular content, instructional methods, and assessment techniques (Downing, 2010) to optimize their inclusion in education.

Functional curriculum benefits a significant number of these children, but many require access to academic curriculum (Hallahan et al., 2012; Heward, 2013) to reach their full potential. Unfortunately, inappropriate instructional techniques hinder their access to academic curriculum in mainstream educational settings (Curriculum Development Center, 2007). Thus, these students often find themselves adapting to the existing educational system rather than having educational services tailored to their unique learning needs. Consequently, they do not receive inclusive education services in Nepali mainstream classrooms despite attending general educational programs alongside their peers without disabilities.

Nawadays, most children with severe and profound intellectual disabilities who attend schools receive educational services in segregated settings either in special schools or resource classrooms. This segregation fails to provide their typically developing peers with an understanding of their unique learning needs and to prepare them for adulthood. To optimize access to the curriculum, all children should be educated in mainstream classrooms with appropriate educational support (Shogren & Wehmeyer, 2015). Inclusive educational environments offer these children the opportunity to make significant learning gains compared to segregated settings, enabling them to actively participate in the educational process, acquire life skills, and access the general education curriculum (Shogren et al., 2017). When children with intellectual disabilities are taught with their same age peers without disabilities ten all of

them can spend their adult life in the future more efficiently.

Despite the Nepalese government's commitment to providing free education, including to children with intellectual disabilities (Nepal Law Commission, 2015), 2.6 percent of children remain without access to basic level education (Center for Education and Human Resource Development, 2021). Poor instructional delivery, limited physical facilities, inflexible curricula, and insufficient support contribute to the high dropout rate among impoverished and children with disabilities (Human Rights Watch, 2011). The instructional techniques used are often non-interactive and lack meaningful engagement with learners (Curriculum Development Center, 2007). As a result, students with intellectual disabilities perform poorly in examinations, frequently repeat grades, and ultimately leave school. Educating them under an inclusive setting offers a solution to enhance their academic performance, create a stimulating learning environment, and increase retention rates in basic education.

Benefits of Educating Children with Intellectual Disabilities in Inclusive Setting

Inclusive education, a global advocacy, seeks to integrate children with intellectual disabilities into regular classrooms. This approach benefits both students with disabilities and their peers without disabilities. Research (Lee et al., 2015 for example) indicates that children with intellectual disabilities make significant developmental progress in inclusive settings, and the quality of teaching is generally higher compared to segregated or general educational settings. Current inclusive practices focus on the comprehensive educational program, encompassing the 'where,' 'how,' and 'what' of student learning (Shogren & Wehmeyer,

2015). This approach tailors support to students with intellectual disabilities based on their individual learning profiles. In special education classrooms, many parents have reported that their children receive repetitive and non-meaningful assignments (Burke, 2015). In contrast, inclusive classrooms foster academic growth, improved communication skills, and increased employment prospects for students with intellectual disabilities. Evidence supports the positive outcomes of inclusive education, including enhanced social interaction opportunities, increased engagement in tasks, improved skill acquisition, enhanced social competence, and greater access to the general education curriculum (Shogren et al., 2017). Consequently, educating children with intellectual disabilities in inclusive settings is crucial for their social well-being and independency in future.

The development of inclusive education at the school level is influenced by several factors, including government policies, available resources, administrative support, and collaboration among educators and school personnel. Teachers' attitudes and knowledge regarding the inclusion of children with diverse needs, along with their sense of efficacy, play pivotal roles in the success of inclusion (Lee et al., 2015). It means, students with intellectual disabilities require accessible learning materials, supportive staff, and conducive learning environments to ensure their access to the curriculum. The educational focus varies depending on the severity of the intellectual disability: milder disabilities emphasize academic skills, while more severe disabilities prioritize self-help, community living, and vocational skills. Students with profound intellectual disabilities benefit from systematic instruction in real-life settings with tangible materials (Hallahan et al., 2012). Neglecting the quality of education

for these children leads to increased social and financial burdens on society in terms of healthcare and social security (Human Rights Watch, 2018). Segregated educational settings also hinder students with intellectual disabilities and their typically developing peers from understanding each other, which can make it challenging for them to coexist in the broader social context as adults. Therefore, it is essential to ensure that students with intellectual disabilities are educated alongside their typically developing peers to provide them with access to the general education curriculum.

Ways of Processing Information by Children with Intellectual Disabilities

Students with intellectual disabilities exhibit a wide range of learning characteristics. Typically, they experience slower learning rates, struggle to identify relevant information within the educational materials, and often do not readily demonstrate acquired skills. Additionally, these students frequently encounter communication challenges, particularly in understanding content, expressing what they have learned, and articulating their individual needs. Consequently, they face difficulties in both processing received information and conveying it through both spoken and written means (Vaughn, Bos, & Schumm, 2018). Although, these children do not face difficulty in receiving information through various sensory channels such as vision, hearing, motor activity, touch, taste, and smell. They encounter difficulties in retaining information, categorizing them, making connections between different pieces of information, and possess limited reasoning and assessment abilities. These challenges contribute to poor expressive skills either speaking and writing effectively, which ultimately affect their social interactions and academic performance (Kirk et al., 2015). Therefore, children with

intellectual disabilities should be treated based on their special learning needs to optimize their inclusion in education.

Educational Rights of Children With Intellectual Disabilities

Children with intellectual disabilities and their educational rights are protected under Article 24 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD). This article underscores the right of individuals with disabilities to education and mandates that states must establish an inclusive education system across all levels. The CRPD ensures that individuals with disabilities have equal access to inclusive, high-quality primary and secondary education (United Nations, 2006; as cited in Shogren & Wehmeyer, 2015). Inclusive education means adapting the educational system to meet the specific needs of children rather than expecting them to conform to a standardized system (Zelta, 2016). Unfortunately, in some cases, students with disabilities including those with poor cognitive abilities may experience exclusion in their classrooms, hindering their access to the curriculum. The practice of adaptation is essential to ensure that these students have access to the curriculum and instruction in general classrooms (Kearney, 2009). School professionals therefore must work diligently to eliminate curriculum-related barriers to institutionalize the educational rights of children, including those with intellectual disabilities.

The Constitution of Nepal stipulates that every citizen has the right to free and compulsory education up to the basic level and free education up to the secondary level, provided by the state. Additionally, all persons with disabilities have the right to receive free education up to the university level in an appropriate medium of instruction (Nepal Law Commission, 2015). The Ministry

of Women, Children, and Senior Citizen [MWCSC] (2019) has stressed that children with disabilities should not be separated from their homes and families. The National Education Policy-2076 has also included provisions for children with and without disabilities to receive education together in an inclusive setting (Ministry of Education, Science, & Technology [MOEST], 2019). Despite these provisions for inclusive education, children with disabilities often face challenges in mainstream schools due to inadequate support systems, leading to their segregation from their families and peers for the sake of their education.

Curriculum for Children with Intellectual Disabilities for Their Inclusion in Education

Children with intellectual disabilities and the school curriculum have had a complex historical relationship. Prior to the "mainstreaming" movement of the late 1960s and early 1970s, it was commonly believed that the content of general education classrooms was beyond the comprehension of children with intellectual disabilities. During that time, professionals in the field often emphasized functional curricula for students with moderate and severe intellectual disabilities, while students with mild form of intellectual disability were encouraged to focus on core academic skills (Thompson et al., 2017). Although many children with intellectual disabilities can access general education curricula, a significant portion still require functional curricula (Heward, 2013; Shaw & Jankowska, 2018). Functional curriculum content, as emphasized by Heward (2013), focuses on fostering independence, self-direction, health, fitness, and enjoyment in various life domains, including school, home, community, and work environments. Both general and special education teachers should strive to align academic and functional

curricula, ensuring that each student benefits as much as possible from the general education curriculum while also receiving personalized instruction in functional skills (Heward, 2013).

Children with intellectual disabilities typically exhibit deficits in cognitive abilities and adaptive behaviors (conceptual, social, and practical skills) compared to their peers with average cognitive abilities (Heward, 2013; Kirk et al., 2015). Therefore, curricula for these children should focus on developing communication skills, self-care, social skills, basic academic skills, self-regulation skills, independent functioning in the community, and employability to enhance their social integration (Westwood, 2007; Shaw & Jankowska, 2018). Providing opportunities for learning in natural settings can help them transfer acquired knowledge and skills to novel situations effectively. Considering the varying degrees of intellectual disability, it's clear that a one-size-fits-all curriculum is inadequate. Students with moderate intellectual disabilities may be capable of unskilled work under close supervision, while those with profound and severe intellectual disabilities may require constant supervision and one-on-one support (Shaw & Jankowska, 2018). Therefore, a continuum of services should be provided to the children with intellectual disabilities to maximize their inclusion in education.

The primary goal in educating children with intellectual disabilities is to provide reality-based learning to maximize the access to the curriculum. This approach involves high-quality direct teaching, breaking down content into simple steps, and ensuring a high success rate for students (Westwood, 2007; Shaw & Jankowska, 2018). It's crucial for the education system to avoid

instructional models that perpetuate the 'fallacy of perceived incompetence,' where expectations are low, and students with intellectual disabilities are not provided with a high-quality curriculum or direct instruction in segregated settings (Williams-Diehm & Palmer, 2017). To optimize access to the general education curriculum for students with intellectual disabilities, teachers should develop Individualized Education Plans (IEPs). These IEPs should include measurable annual goals, both academic and functional, designed to address the child's specific disability and facilitate progress in the general curriculum.

Approaches to Enhancing Access of These Children to the Curriculum

A large number of students with intellectual disabilities cannot develop higher order cognitive skills. Curricular objectives from lower order cognitive skills can be benefitted for them. Bloom's taxonomy (Ornstein & Hunkins, 2017; Marzano & Kendall, 2007) can assist in setting curricular goals and developing assessment tools suited for children with intellectual disabilities. Teachers can tailor all instructional activities based on this taxonomy to meet their individual learning needs by setting benchmarks from lower levels especially for moderate and severe levels of intellectual disabilities. Furthermore, multiple means of representation, engagement, and expression should also be provided to maximize their access to the general education curriculum (Kirk et al., 2015; Gargiulo & Metcalf, 2013). Universal Design for Learning (UDL) provides alternative ways for students to acquire information, demonstrate learning, and engage in the learning process to achieve learning standards of curriculum.

Similarly, strength-based approach (Shogren & Wehmeyer, 2015) can also be an effective

approach to nurture the unique strengths and abilities of students with intellectual disabilities. By recognizing and harnessing individual strengths, such as sense of humor, visual motor skills, or musical talents, educators can support the development and well-being of these students. Multitier support system can also be beneficial for children with intellectual disabilities to provide educational services especially in universal tier (supports provided in general classroom), targeted tier (supports provided in small groups), and intensive tier (individualized supports) to ensure their inclusion in education (Backenson, 2012). By targeting the specific needs of students, including those with intellectual disabilities, at each tier, resources are allocated efficiently to prevent academic failure and promote academic competency. In addition, Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) can also play a crucial role in optimizing access of these children to curriculum (Vaughn et al., 2018). Supplementary aids and supports such as curriculum modifications, assistive technology, extended time, etc. are also found effective to enable children with intellectual disabilities to participate in general education to the maximum extent possible (Wehmeyer & Lee, 2017). Systematic instruction (Vaughn et al., 2018) can also be effective for teaching daily living skills and functional curriculum for children with intellectual disabilities. By adopting these strategies, educators can create an inclusive and supportive learning environment that ensures that children with intellectual disabilities have meaningful access to the general education curriculum.

Role of Teachers for Creating Inclusive Learning Environment

Teachers who have students with intellectual disabilities in their classrooms should actively engage in their students' educational plans, collaborate closely with them, and establish

effective communication and collaboration with specialists to provide quality services (Vaughn et al., 2018). Though some of these children cannot meet learning standards determined in the curriculum (Fisher & Meyer, 2002; as cited in Williams-Diehm & Palmer, 2017), teachers should have high expectations from them to strengthen their learning. Educators who work with these students from an early age should possess the necessary knowledge and skills to facilitate positive outcomes. The absence of highly qualified and trained teachers can have a detrimental impact on student learning and achievement (Copeland & Keefe, 2017; Williams-Diehm & Palmer, 2017). Additionally, the education system should avoid instructional models that fail to recognize the importance of inclusion, as such models perpetuate the "fallacy of perceived incompetence." This leads to lower expectations, limited access to high-quality curriculum, instruction in segregated settings, and minimal direct instruction. Effective, evidence-based instruction at the elementary level is essential to encourage these children to access the general curriculum according to grade-level standards (Williams-Diehm & Palmer, 2017).

Research has shown that students tend to perform significantly better academically when educated alongside their peers in a general classroom setting. Separating students with special needs from general education can result in isolated academic and social lives, which may not align with their everyday experiences (Causton & Tracy-Bronson, 2015). Some students with intellectual disabilities have the potential to learn how to read, but unfortunately, many teachers and professionals have low expectations regarding their reading abilities. These low expectations often result in limited or poor-quality instruction, leading to significantly reduced reading skills among

these students (Copeland & Keefe, 2017). Teachers with positive attitudes toward inclusion are more likely to support children in inclusive educational settings and adapt their instructional techniques and materials to accommodate individual learning needs. However, it is worth noting that the severity of the disability can influence teachers' attitudes toward inclusion, with more severe disabilities often leading to more negative views (Lee et al., 2015). For this, adequate training, orientation, and exposure visit in exemplary schools should be provided to teachers.

Under Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (2004), teachers are tasked with adapting content and instructional techniques to meet the diverse learning needs of all students and ensure their access to school activities (as cited in Brownell et al., 2012). Some students with intellectual disabilities may benefit from an alternative, more functional curriculum, which could include subjects like language and communication, community living, domestic skills, socialization, self-help, and vocational and leisure skills (Heward, 2013). Therefore, it is incumbent upon school teachers to differentiate their instruction and teach functional subject matter as needed to make the curriculum more accessible and relevant for all including those with intellectual disabilities.

Making Assessment Procedures Inclusive for Children with Intellectual Disabilities

A considerable number of students with intellectual disabilities may face barriers to accessing general assessments that ultimately hinder them to convey their knowledge or exhibit their skills through conventional means. Accommodating testing tools, exam setting, and time encourages them to express their knowledge and skills (Vaughn et al., 2018). Furthermore, the use

of alternative assessments can also be a viable solution to render testing procedures more accessible for such students. Students with severe intellectual disabilities follow alternate achievement standards (AAS) and modified achievement standards (MAS) but many of them can get access to grade level achievement standards (GLAS). Therefore, students with severe intellectual disabilities can be more benefitted from alternate assessment prepared based on alternate achievement standards (AA-AAS). Similarly, students working on grade-level material but requiring additional time to master content benefit from alternate assessment based on modified academic achievement standards (AA-MAS). Additionally, alternate assessment based on grade-level achievement standards (AA-GLAS) is suitable for students operating at grade level but needing diverse testing formats to demonstrate their grasp of standards (Vaughn et al., 2018). It means, alternative assessments are not required to all students with intellectual disabilities (Karvonen et al., 2017). Therefore, assessment should be accommodated or modified based on the individual needs of children to ensure their inclusion in education.

Traditionally, common designs for alternate assessments have included portfolios, checklists, and performance assessments. Studies have shown that between 32% and 45% of students with intellectual disabilities may require alternate assessments based on alternate achievement standards (Karvonen et al., 2017). These assessments are specifically designed for those who cannot be evaluated through traditional methods, even with the provision of accommodations. They encompass a range of techniques, such as direct observation of specific behaviors, checklists, rating scales, curriculum-based measures (Hallahan et al., 2012), individual testing, portfolio assessments, and audio or

video recordings (Heward, 2013). Thus, it is necessary to apply alternate assessments as needed for learners with intellectual disabilities, though they receive educational services in a general education setting. Then, all students including those with intellectual disabilities can get access to assessment procedures.

Classroom Setting for Strengthening Inclusion of Children with Intellectual Disabilities

Accessible physical infrastructure for all children, including those with intellectual disabilities, is a prerequisite for inclusive education. By ensuring physically accessible infrastructure, schools enhance the inclusivity of curricula, instructional methods, and assessment procedures. It's crucial to emphasize that students with intellectual disabilities are integral members of general education, not mere guests in inclusive programs. In such an educational setting, every child, irrespective of their learning style, pace, preferences, or cognitive abilities, can access a high-quality education with a meaningful curriculum and effective instructional process. Students with intellectual disabilities are warmly embraced as a part of the school community, with equal access to the complete spectrum of learning experiences, environments, and social networks offered to their peers without disabilities (Kurth et al., 2017). Creating an accessible classroom environment not only enhances students' learning but also fosters a child-friendly and inclusive atmosphere within the school.

The characteristics of a learning environment, including classroom arrangement, laboratory facilities, teaching methods, learning styles, and assessment techniques, significantly impact students' academic achievements and overall learning outcomes, both cognitively

and affectively (Vaughn et al., 2018). This influence becomes more phenomenal when students have intellectual disabilities (Best et al., 2015). In this context, it is crucial to use concrete and meaningful examples and activities, conduct frequent reviews, and promote independent thinking based on the unique needs of students with intellectual disabilities. Feedback and reinforcement should be consistently applied, especially for more challenging tasks. Additionally, students with intellectual disabilities should be afforded ample opportunities to learn within natural settings to facilitate the generalization and retention of acquired knowledge and skills (Heward, 2013). As a whole, the classroom environment should be designed to be resourceful and supportive, fostering an inclusive learning atmosphere for all students, including those with intellectual disabilities.

Educational Services for Children with Intellectual Disabilities in Nepal

Nepal has ratified various international human rights treaties by acknowledging the equal rights to inclusive education for all (Human Rights Watch, 2011). The essence of this commitment is to enable children, both with and without disabilities, to attend schools in their communities without facing discrimination. This approach is designed to adapt the educational environment and teaching methods to cater to the diverse needs of all students. In theory, the government promotes an inclusive educational policy; however, in practice, it primarily supports a system that maintains special schools and segregated resource classes for children with intellectual disabilities within mainstream schools. While transitioning from resource classes to a fully inclusive education system takes time, the government's efforts to ensure quality education under an inclusive setting

for children with intellectual disabilities have been insufficient.

In the context of Nepal, children with intellectual disabilities face limited access to formal education due to various factors, including a lack of awareness about their right to education, the long distance to schools, inadequate physical infrastructure, a scarcity of instructional materials, and the negative attitudes of teachers towards their learning abilities (Human Rights Watch, 2018). Some studies (CERID, 2006 for example), have revealed that teachers in Nepal have received limited training in the necessary knowledge and skills. They may lack even a basic understanding of Individualized Education Plans (IEPs), which play a crucial role in implementing inclusive education in actual classroom practices especially for the case of those who have severe and profound degree of disabilities. Despite the theoretical promotion of inclusive education policies by Government of Nepal, in practice, the support is directed toward a system of segregated resource classes within mainstream schools and separate schools for children with various disabilities including intellectual disabilities (Human Rights Watch, 2011). In this educational institutions, they generally learn basic life skills such as personal hygiene and self-care (Human Rights Watch, 2018). As teachers are pivotal to the implementation of inclusive education, it is essential to provide them with proper training to enhance their knowledge, attitudes, and skills to address learning diversity exists in mainstream classroom.

Furthermore, the inclusive education policy in Nepal lacks a clear plan for integrating children with disabilities, especially those with intellectual disabilities, into mainstream schools. These schools often suffer from

inadequate staffing, rigid curricula, and a shortage of teaching materials, resulting in an inferior quality of education for children with disabilities when compared to their peers without disabilities. The government's provision of special education training to teachers working in special schools or resource classes is minimal, and mainstream school teachers are often not adequately trained on how to include children with disabilities in their classrooms. Moreover, all students are expected to follow the same lessons within a structured routine, causing children with disabilities in mainstream schools to face repeated failures and a higher likelihood of early dropout. While many students with intellectual disabilities receive educational services through resource classrooms within mainstream schools, they continue to be taught in a segregated manner, lacking access to the general education curriculum. Instead of accommodating and modifying the educational setting to meet their distinct learning needs and interests, they are required to fit into the existing instructional framework. In this regard, inclusive education could serve as an alternative approach to maximize their access to the general education curriculum in mainstream classroom.

Despite progress in laws and policies, the government still segregates most children with disabilities for the reason of education (Human Rights Watch, 2018). Teacher training for inclusive education remains lacking, and this approach could be pivotal in enhancing the learning experience for all students, including those with intellectual disabilities, while dismantling harmful stereotypes about these children. The majority of mainstream schools suffer from a shortage of trained teachers, accessible learning materials, appropriate physical infrastructure, and accessible testing procedures. As a result, children with intellectual disabilities often

do not have access to the general education curriculum within mainstream classrooms. Nevertheless, the government is taking steps to address these challenges. It is in the process of developing an inclusive education master plan that aims to create disability-friendly educational environment, expand physical infrastructure, enhance teacher training, and establish a flexible curriculum. Although students with intellectual disabilities could significantly benefit from inclusive educational programs, they have been predominantly educated in segregated settings, such as special schools and resource classrooms. A separate curriculum, consisting of three levels, has been introduced to develop functional skills for these students. This situation, unfortunately, undermines their constitutional right to study alongside their typically developing peers in their own communities.

Conclusions

Inclusive education is not merely a matter of policy but a fundamental right for all children. Since inclusive education fosters social acceptance, improves academic performance, and empowers all students, including those with intellectual disabilities, to lead fulfilling lives, it should be effectively institutionalized in every classroom. However, the practical implementation of inclusive education in countries like Nepal still faces significant challenges due to a variety of reasons. The gap between policy intentions and actual practice leads to segregated educational settings and limited opportunities for children with intellectual disabilities to be educated in an inclusive setting. Therefore, it is imperative that governments, educators, and society as a whole work together to bridge these gaps, provide necessary training to teachers, make the infrastructure and resources accessible for diverse learners,

practice differentiated instruction, and create a truly inclusive learning environment in Nepali classrooms. Curriculum, pedagogical practices, assessment procedures, and classroom settings should be made inclusive to maximize the inclusion of children with intellectual disabilities in education.

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