

Inclusive Education in Practice: Exploring Teachers' Struggles in Far-West Province in Nepal

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Abstract

This study explores the challenges faced by teachers in teaching students with physical disabilities. Using an explorative qualitative case study design, data were collected through in-depth interviews with three physically disabled teachers in an inclusive school in Kailali district. The study identifies five key challenges related to the teaching and learning process for physically disabled students, such as a lack of disability-assistive infrastructure, limited parental support, financial constraints, inadequate teacher training and instructional materials, and personal and individual challenges. These multiple factors hinder not only the learning of disabled students but also the creation of an inclusive and supportive learning environment. The study concludes that addressing these challenges demands collaborative efforts from policymakers, stakeholders, researchers, and educators to ensure equitable access to quality education for all students, regardless of their physical abilities. The study suggests the need for comprehensive targets such

as investments in specialized teacher training and resources, infrastructure, and instructional materials, along with initiatives to enhance community and parental engagement in the educational process, tailored to the diverse needs of students with physical disabilities.

Keywords: Case study, challenges, physical disabilities, teaching and learning process

Introduction

A physical disability is a substantial and enduring condition that impairs a person's physical functionality, mobility, stamina, or capabilities (University of Western Sydney, 2012). It affects a person's ability to walk, use their hands and arms, sit and stand, and control their muscles. While physical impairments may not entirely prevent certain activities, they undoubtedly make them more challenging. Everyday tasks, such as dressing oneself or carrying objects, can become significantly more time-consuming. Physical disabilities can be either congenital, present at birth, or acquired later in life due to illness or accident (Best et al., 2010).

In society, individuals with disabilities face numerous challenges, which necessitate legislative and educational responses. In 1971, the first major legislative action aimed at helping individuals with physical disabilities was passed, targeting the vocational needs of World War I veterans. This effort was expanded in 1975 when President Gerald Ford signed the Education for All Handicapped Children Act, mandating that all children with disabilities receive a free, appropriate public education (FAPE) in the least restrictive environment. The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990, signed by President George H. W. Bush, further guaranteed equal opportunities in employment, public accommodation, transportation, state and local government services, and telecommunications for individuals with disabilities.

The importance of inclusive education was reaffirmed by the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in the 1990 World Declaration and the 1994 Salamanca Statement and Framework on Special Needs Education. These documents emphasized that all children, regardless of any physical, intellectual, social, emotional, linguistic, or other challenges, should be accommodated in schools. This global agreement ensured that individuals with disabilities could access their educational rights, promoting the principles of special education and inclusive schooling (Dass, 2022). The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 2004) mandates a multidisciplinary evaluation of children

with disabilities, incorporating various assessment tools to gather comprehensive information from parents. This approach ensures that children meet the federal definition of disability, enabling them to receive appropriate educational support. In Nepal, the government defines physical disabilities as issues arising from problems in nerves, muscles, and the composition and operation of bones and joints (Government of Nepal, 2006). Examples include polio, cerebral palsy, muscular dystrophy, and spinal cord issues. Despite legislative efforts, a significant number of children with physical disabilities in Nepal lack direct access to education. The Central Bureau of Statistics (2011) reported that around 1.96% of Nepal's population has some form of disability, highlighting the need for improved educational access.

Disability is an inherent aspect of the human condition, with almost everyone likely to experience temporary or permanent functional difficulties at some point in their lives (WHO, 2024). Since the 1970s, responses to disability have evolved significantly, driven by the self-organization of individuals with disabilities and the recognition of disability as a human rights issue. Vygotsky's theory of socio-cultural interaction (1978) suggests that children learn better in interactive environments, indicating the importance of classroom environments in the cognitive development of children with physical disabilities. Addressing the educational needs of children with physical disabilities is crucial for fostering an inclusive and equitable society. Despite progress in recognizing disability as a human rights issue, significant barriers to inclusive education remain, indicating multiple factors (Khanal, 2019). Studies, such as those by Jung and Pandey (2018), highlight the urgent need for specialized curricula and effective classroom practices to ensure quality education for children with physical disabilities.

Research by Macinnis (2012) revealed that the support of instructors, teacher assistants, classmates, and friends significantly impacts the education of students with physical disabilities. Similarly, Andrade and Fukuda (2016) found that social interactions and attitudinal barriers significantly affect the inclusion and development of students with physical disabilities. Few studies have been conducted in Nepal focusing on teachers' attitudes towards inclusive education, such as those by Sharma (2020) and Singh (2023). In the above-mentioned literature, there is less focus on the challenges faced by physically disabled teachers in teaching students with disabilities. These studies lack the inclusion of specific context, focusing on the teachers' perspective as well as the multiple challenges that are not adequately explored. While addressing these discrepancies, this study has provided

a comprehensive overview of multiple challenges and contributed to the existing solutions regarding strategies, policies, and practices for inclusive education. Thus, this study seeks to explore the teachers' struggles and Support Needs in teaching children with physical disabilities. The results will be important to policymakers, stakeholders, researchers, and teachers in relation to special needs education and will assist in the creation of more inclusive educational settings.

Literature Review

Nepal's educational policy has begun to emphasize educational inclusion (Nepal Ministry of Education, 2019). The School Education Sector Plan (2022) has emphasized programs such as teacher training for this (Nepal Disability Portal, 2022). However, due to Nepal's contextual, socio-cultural, and structural barriers, many gaps are seen in inclusive education teaching. Recent literature on this topic has highlighted the lack of teacher training. In the Far West, teachers lack knowledge and skills about inclusive education, which hinders the inclusive learning process (Niure & Shrestha, 2021). Similarly, the lack of job security for teachers is another major factor that hinders effective teacher training (Thapaliya, 2022). Society's negative view of people with special needs also affects teaching practice (Niure & Shrestha, 2021; Thapalia, 2022). Teachers' self-efficacy (Basnet et al., 2022) plays a positive role in their inclusive learning (Woodcock et al., 2022).

Inclusive teaching needs good classroom management and resources to meet the learners with remedial needs (Maree, 2021). There is another challenge that children with physical disabilities are unable to get regular classes and education due to the effective and separate curriculum for special education and that of normal students. Shrestha (2017) suggested that teachers have a positive attitude and are somehow skilled in implementing various teaching strategies and approaches of inclusive education in the classroom. Vygotsky (1978) stated that children learn better when they get maximum interactive opportunities in the classroom environment.

Methodology

This study employs a qualitative research method, utilizing a case study design to explain the particular barriers voiced by teachers in an inclusive school for physically disabled students for an in-depth examination of a particular person, organization, or event, providing a detailed and contextual understanding of the subject (Yan, 2018). In this research, we focus on an organization where students with physical disabilities reside and receive their education (School report, 2022).

By delving deeply into this specific context, the study aims to gain concrete and comprehensive insights (Khanal et al., 2023, Khanal et al., 2024) into the challenges perceived by teachers in the teaching and learning process for students with physical disabilities.

In this study, one inclusive school was chosen as the research site as a case situated in Godawari Municipality-3, Kailali District, in the Sudurpaschim Province of Nepal. This school provides a specific context where teachers with physical disabilities teach students with same problems. This institution provides a bounded case, specific to its demography, facilities, and socio-educational setting. The school was established in 2067 B.S. with the mission of providing foundational education to pupils with physical disabilities (Apang Ekta Samaj Kailali, 2064). The school serves 65 pupils with physical disabilities and is staffed by eight instructional staff members, two caregivers, and one support person. Constructed using bricks, cement, and an iron roof, the school is situated near the Dadeldhura Highway and is surrounded by a border wall to ensure the safety of its students. The school is dedicated to offering fundamental education to individuals with physical disabilities (Apang Ekta Samaj Kailali, 2064).

There were altogether eight teachers in this school. Among them, only three were physically disabled teachers currently teaching students with similar disabilities along with their involvement in teaching and learning activities with children facing similar challenges. In this study, we included all three teachers as participants.

We collected information through in-depth interviews (IDI) guided by a framework developed by the first author. The interview guidelines focused on key areas such as managing difficult students, using teaching materials, providing learning support, maintaining discipline, assessing student progress, addressing challenges, and navigating difficult situations. Where necessary, probe questions were used to elicit deeper and more detailed responses. All interviews were audio-recorded.

To ensure quality, the study employed credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Guba & Lincoln, 1985). Credibility was achieved through prolonged engagement with participants and data validation. Transferability was supported by detailed descriptions of the research context. Dependability was ensured through thorough documentation, while confirmability was maintained by

triangulating interviews. These measures were used to enhance the study's accuracy and trustworthiness.

Prior to data collection, informed consent was secured from the school administration and the participants, who were fully informed about the study's purpose, procedures, and their right to withdraw at any point. Confidentiality was maintained by anonymizing participants' identities and securely storing the data. The researchers carefully addressed participants' needs and concerns, ensuring their involvement did not result in any distress or discomfort. These measures were implemented to adhere to ethical standards and protect the rights and well-being of all study participants.

Data Analysis Method

The audio-recorded data were transcribed in the Nepali language and translated into English. The data were thematically analyzed. First, the researcher read the transcript and observation notes several times to thoroughly understand it. Then, the initial codes were developed in order to organize the data into meaningful groups. The codes were then combined to generate three themes. The themes were further reviewed and refined to ensure they accurately captured the data and aligned with research objectives (Table 1).

Table 1

Themes, categories and codes of the study

| Themes | Categories | Codes |
|--|---------------------------------|--|
| Academic Challenges | Resource | Lack of Assistive Devices, Limited |
| | Limitations | Teaching Materials, Inadequate Classroom Facilities, Financial Constraints |
| | Professional Development | Insufficient Teacher Training, Community and Support Challenges |
| | Educational Practices | Evaluation Process Issues, Limited Knowledge |
| Parental and Community Support/Infrastructure | Parental Attitudes | Lack of cooperation, denial of disabilities, superstitious beliefs, preference for special schools |

| | | |
|---|---------------------------------|---|
| | Community Awareness | Misconceptions about disability, need for public campaigns, professional training to change attitudes |
| | Classroom Infrastructure | Lack of disability-friendly classrooms, inadequate benches/desks, insufficient living and recreational spaces |
| | Facilities and Equipment | Old or inadequate wheelchairs, insufficient playgrounds, lack of separate toilets, need for modern equipment |
| | Financial Constraints | Budget Issues Lack of financial support, insufficient funds for daily needs, inadequate scholarships for all students |
| | | Resource Allocation Financial support only for a limited number of students, need for more equitable distribution of resources |
| Training and Instructional Materials | Teacher Training | Insufficient training, need for specialized training, lack of workshops and seminars |
| | Teaching Materials | Insufficient and outdated materials, need for specialized resources for diverse learning needs |
| Individual Challenges | Physical Limitations | Difficulty in movement, issues with holding notebooks, challenges in maintaining personal health and hygiene |
| | Support and Care | Limited supportive aids, lack of individual care, need for special attention, importance of empathy, necessity of frequent motivation |

Results and Discussion

This section discusses the key themes from the study based on its objectives. Learners with physical disabilities face significant challenges in conventional educational systems, especially in rural areas of Nepal, where resources are limited.

Participants highlighted issues such as academic difficulties, lack of parental support, financial constraints, inadequate infrastructure, and the need for suitable teaching aids.

Academic Challenges

Teaching students with physical disabilities presents significant academic challenges, primarily due to inadequate resources and training. The conventional teaching approach, as reported by participants, lacks essential assistive devices and specialized materials. Participants noted the absence of modern aids, well-managed classrooms, and appropriate curricula, highlighting a gap in support for both teachers and students. This points to a conventional approach to teaching where no assistive devices are used, and there are no teaching aids to enhance teaching and learning:

With me, there are no modern assistive devices, less training for the teacher, lack of teaching aids. There are no well-managed classrooms and school buildings. There are no teaching materials and textbooks and separate curricula for disabled children. The evaluation process is also the same as for general students (P1, IDI 1, male teacher).

The analysis further underscored the financial constraints and insufficient resources, including outdated equipment and a lack of modern teaching tools. This highlights the financial constraints and lack of necessary materials in classrooms for physically disabled children. These limitations hinder the creation of an effective learning environment:

There are so many challenges to teaching students with physical disabilities such as financial problems, availability of teaching-learning materials, modern tools and technology, training, community participation, no advanced assistive devices, well-facilitated classrooms, modern wheelchairs, and trained manpower (ID 2, IDI 2, male teacher).

Numerous studies highlight the academic challenges faced by teachers and students, particularly in inclusive and mixed-ability classrooms, as our study noted. Humphrey (2014) identifies significant obstacles for teachers working with children with developmental disabilities in Tanzania, largely due to insufficient training in special needs education. Similarly, S'lungile Thwala (2015) reveals that teachers in Swaziland struggle to manage inclusive classrooms effectively, primarily because they lack training and resources. Both studies emphasize the need for enhanced

professional development and specialized training to create effective learning environments for all students.

There is a lack of evidence from similar research in Nepal and beyond. Teachers have similar challenges, according to pedagogical research on children with special needs. Such as Mumpuniarti (2017) found that common teaching practices are often ineffective, particularly in improving literacy and numeracy among specific needs students. There are difficulties in preparing appropriate teaching materials and adapting the curriculum to individual students' needs (Asmaveedu, 2021). Academic challenges are major challenges to teaching children with physical disabilities, such as a lack of training (Reed & Monday-Amaya, 1995; NJCLD, 1998) and training model (Reed & Monday-Amaya, 1995; NJCLD, 1998) and lack of teaching practice according to the needs of special students (Cho et al., 2013).

Despite constitutional guarantees of education for all children, including those with disabilities, several challenges remain, and investment remains inadequate (UNDP, 2021). The low level of financial and infrastructural support is a major barrier, resulting in a discouraging situation for both students and the special needs education sector in Nepal.

Community and Parental Support/ Involvement

Teachers reported that many parents are uncooperative and rarely engage with the school after enrolling their child. This lack of involvement reflects a reluctance to accept their child's disability, often perceived as a consequence of past actions.

Parents are less cooperative and less supportive. They just admit their child to the school and rarely come into contact. Her experience is that parents do not accept their children's disabilities. They feel it is the result of their past actions (ID 3, IDI 3, female teacher).

Supernatural beliefs and conservative thoughts further impact parental involvement. Another teacher highlighted that "No parents come back to the school after the admission of their child. Even during vacations, they want their child to stay in school." Such attitudes are linked to a desire to avoid social stigma and maintain social prestige. The sharing also indicates the reason for the preference for special schools and special homes:

No one's parents come back to the school after admission of their child,” for that school calls and informs them. Even during the vacation, they want their child to stay in school (P3, IDI 3, female teacher).

Parental and community-related challenges, such as varying levels of ability and learning styles, complicate the educational landscape. This is echoed by studies like Rema (2016), which explores the difficulties of teaching in mixed-ability classrooms and highlights the importance of personalized teaching strategies, ongoing teacher support, and building students' confidence. Borah (2013) discusses the challenges of inclusive education and the role of teachers and guardians in supporting slow learners. Parental expectations and denial of a child's learning disability create barriers for teachers, compounded by a lack of necessary support and cooperation from parents (Asmaveedu, 2021). Lamichhane (2012) found that parental attitudes towards disability are slowly improving, though conservative thoughts regarding disability still lead to less parental support and absenteeism in guardian meetings.

To address these issues, establishing discussion forums for parents of disabled children, media campaigns, and professional training are essential to correct misconceptions and foster a supportive community. Changing the perception of disability from being seen as a burden to recognizing the potential of differently-abled individuals require concerted efforts in public education and awareness campaigns (Lamichhane, 2012).

Infrastructural Challenges

Inadequate infrastructure is a significant barrier to the education of children with disabilities. Participants noted the absence of disability-friendly classrooms, furniture, bedrooms, canteens, and toilets, highlighting that the institution lacks the necessary facilities for disabled children.

The infrastructure of the school is not sufficient for the students. There is a problem of disabled-friendly classroom, bench and desk, bed rooms, canteen and toilet (P2, IDI 2, Female teacher)

They acknowledged improvements over time but emphasized persistent issues such as inadequate playgrounds, movement difficulties within the school, and outdated wheelchairs needing modernization. These improvements, while noted, still fall short of creating a fully supportive environment for children with disabilities.

School's infrastructure is better than the past but it is not sufficient for the students. There is a problem of playground, problem in movement from class to bed room, class room to out-side the class and lobby. *He also shared wheelchairs are old and need to modern and electric* (i.e He also mentioned that the wheelchairs are old and need to be modernized and made electric.) (P2, IDI 2, male teacher).

With extensive experience, it was confirmed that while there have been some improvements since the school's opening, the infrastructure is still inadequate. The school struggles to modernize and create a disability-friendly environment, lacking modern wheelchairs, suitable classrooms, play materials, canteen facilities, and separate toilets for boys and girls. Do you mean to say this?

We have challenges to modernize and make the school friendly for the students with physical disabilities (P3, IDI 3, female teacher).

This finding is further supported by literature highlighting how infrastructural deficiencies hinder the implementation of child-friendly space principles, which are crucial for safeguarding children and fostering their overall and academic development (Save the Children, 2013). Effective policy implementation and planning are crucial to address these issues. Shields & Synnot (2016) emphasize that children with disabilities require appropriate infrastructure to engage in physical activities and safeguard against potential risks. Thus, improving infrastructure is directly proportional to enhancing the participation and well-being of children with disabilities.

Financial Challenges

Financial challenges are significant and require special planning. Institutions need financial support for medical expenses, caregiving, and creating a conducive learning environment. However, the current situation reveals severe budgetary limitations and insufficient support from parents and the community. The findings highlighted chronic budget shortages and the lack of financial support for essential needs such as lodging, food, and education.

There is always a lack of budget, lack of parental and community support (P1, IDI 1, male teacher)

The next views echoed these concerns, noting the insufficiency of funds for daily operations and the lack of hostel facilities for students.

There is no sufficient money for day- to-day life and students are not provided with the hostel facility' (P2, IDI 2, male teacher).

Teachers mentioned that while some students receive a monthly stipend of 4000 rupees, it is limited to those in the school's hostel. Students commuting from home receive only 500 rupees, and the financial support is restricted to just 40-45 students out of a total of around 65, with scholarships provided for only 10 months of the year.

Our students receive a monthly stipend of Rs. 4000 from the government, which is given to those living in the school's hostel. Students who commute from home and require less support for their learning and daily activities receive only Rs. 500. The government provides this stipend for 45 students, but we have around 65 students in total. The Rs. 4000 scholarships is available for only 10 months of the year (P3, IDI 3, female teacher).

The authentic information supports our study findings, revealing that the financial aid from the government is inadequate and inequitably distributed. This disparity falls short of meeting the constitutional guarantee of free and compulsory education for every child up to the basic level (Constitution of Nepal 2072). This shortfall underscores the need for more comprehensive and equitable financial support to cover education and daily living expenses. Additionally, there is a call for regular free health check-ups and nutritional programs sponsored by the government. Financial constraints are a pervasive challenge in the education sector, particularly in developing regions. Studies by Humphrey (2014) and Mumpuniarti (2017) illustrate how limited funding hampers the provision of adequate resources and training for teachers.

Financial limitations also restrict the implementation of specialized programs and the acquisition of necessary instructional materials. Addressing these financial barriers is essential for ensuring that all students, regardless of their abilities, receive a quality education.

Teacher Training and Instructional Materials

Teachers noted the rarity of teacher training and the inadequacy of instructional materials, emphasizing the impracticality of teaching without proper training, *especially for physically disabled children*. Teachers need to be equipped with strategies for managing mobility issues and overcoming potential obstacles. This indicates something disheartening to me since teaching without training especially *to physically disabled children* is impractical. Before they enter the class, teachers need to know about the ways of movement, possible hindrances and ways to tackle. The findings echoed these concerns, highlighting the minimal training opportunities and insufficient teaching materials.

We are rarely supported with teacher training, materials are not sufficient and we are compelled to use old and general teaching materials (P3, IDI 3, female teacher).

The lack of adequate training and instructional materials is a recurring theme in the literature as our study indicated. Humphrey (2014) notes that teachers often feel unprepared to handle the diverse needs of their students due to insufficient training. Teaching students with physical disabilities is complex, requiring specialized infrastructure, a supportive learning environment, assistive devices, rigorous teacher training, and adequate instructional materials. Despite global recognition of inclusion and equity for people with disabilities (World Education Forum, 2015; UN, 2015), significant gaps remain, particularly in developing countries. Simply enrolling students into mainstream classes is insufficient; comprehensive training and tailored instructional materials are essential (Lamichhane, 2015). Additionally, it is crucial to recognize that within the spectrum of disabilities, there are diverse learning needs (Freire, 2000).

Individual Challenges

Students with physical disabilities face immense challenges in day-to-day life as well as attending classes. Respondents experienced difficulty with mobility, constraining students' movement experience and access to their environment. This limitation also applies to their involvement in activities outside of school and socializing, which compounds the aspect of alienation.

The students also struggle with the essentials of classroom learning, namely holding notebooks and writing. Moreover, the most fundamental thing in a

classroom: holding notebooks and writing, is also a challenging task for such kids. Students depend on it for writing essays, taking notes, or participating in any class-related work. The inability to take a bath, wash-up, clean or care for personal belongings also needs support from outside and their deprived feeling leads to higher frustration and alienation among participants.

As our study showed, individual challenges, such as varying levels of ability and learning styles, complicate the educational landscape. Rema (2016) explores the difficulties of teaching in mixed-ability classrooms and the specific needs of slow learners, emphasizing the importance of recognizing and addressing each student's unique challenges. Personalized teaching strategies, ongoing teacher support, and a focus on building students' confidence are essential for helping all learners achieve their full potential. Teachers face challenges in motivating students, building their self-esteem, and addressing emotional issues like mood swings, which significantly impact academic performance (Asmaveedu, 2021). Pizzi (2008) notes that individuals with disabilities may experience nervousness and social withdrawal, leading to diminished social development and increased personal suffocation. Therefore, teachers and other concerned individuals must provide continuous support and act as motivators for these students.

The study acknowledges limitations such as the small sample size and the specific focus on rural Nepal, which may not be generalizable to other contexts. Future research should explore these challenges in different geographical areas and include a larger sample size for more comprehensive insights. So, it is recommended to the future researchers interested in the area to conduct similar study in other provinces of Nepal as well.

Conclusion

The study indicates that the teachers struggle with multiple barriers related to teaching special needs education. First are academic challenges such as inadequate resources, ineffective teaching methods, and lack of training. Second is poor parental and community support and engagement, such as cultural myths, superstitions, etc. Third, a lack of infrastructure, such as lack of classrooms, toilets, and wheelchairs for disabled students. Next are lack of budget, personal challenges, and last are gaps in policy and advocacy. These factors hinder not only the learning of disabled students but also hinder the creation of an inclusive and supportive learning environment. As the study indicates multiple barriers, this study also suggests a multilevel solution

related to teaching special needs education. This study suggests comprehensive reforms, such as underscoring the necessity of training programs related to special needs education. An awareness program should be targeted for community and parent participation in a favorable teaching environment. The disabled students should be counseled and motivated for educational betterment. Arrange the basic care and support for them to promote their well-being and learning. At last, advocate for inclusive education policies and adequate funding, eliminate societal barriers, and ensure equitable opportunities for children with disabilities.

Declaration: This study utilized ChatGPT to enhance the readability.

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