

## **Quality Enhancement in B.Ed. Special Education Programs: A Systematic Review of Curriculum Gaps, Inclusive Education Frameworks, and Teacher Preparation Challenges in India**

Jyoti<sup>1</sup> and Maheep Kumar Mishra<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Research Scholar, <sup>2</sup>Professor, Department of Education, Monad University, Hapur, India  
jyotigodara14@gmail.com

### **Abstract**

The preparation of competent special educators remains a critical yet insufficiently addressed challenge within India's teacher education ecosystem. Despite progressive legislative mandates including the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (RPWD) Act 2016 and the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 systemic deficiencies persist in B.Ed. Special Education programs, particularly in the state of Delhi. This review synthesizes empirical evidence drawn from national and international literature to critically examine three interrelated dimensions: (i) the structural and curricular adequacy of B.Ed. Special Education courses, (ii) the awareness, attitudes, and preparedness of pre-service and in-service teachers toward inclusive education, and (iii) the effectiveness of school internship programs as a mechanism of practical skill development. Evidence from multiple studies conducted across South Asia, Sub-Saharan Africa, Turkey, and Western nations reveals that teacher preparedness for inclusive classrooms remains persistently moderate to low, often hampered by inadequate field exposure, theoretical overcrowding of curricula, and insufficient mentoring structures. Indian-specific data further confirms that B.Ed. trainees demonstrate partial fulfilment of internship expectations and only moderate awareness of inclusive education principles. The paper argues for evidence-based reform of B.Ed. Special Education curricula, extended practicum frameworks, and a restructured mentoring continuum aligned with the disability rights paradigm. Implications for policymakers, curriculum designers, and teacher education institutions are discussed.

**Keywords:** B.Ed. Special Education, inclusive education, teacher preparation, school internship, RPWD Act 2016, NEP 2020, curriculum reform, children with special needs

### **1. Introduction**

Education is widely recognized as a transformative social institution that enables individual flourishing and drives economic development. Within this broader framework, special

education occupies a distinctive and morally imperative space: it concerns itself with children who, on account of physical, sensory, cognitive, or psychological differences, require specialized pedagogical support to access meaningful learning experiences. The global consensus, as reflected in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD, 2006) and the Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG4), clearly articulates the right to inclusive and equitable quality education for all learners, without exception.

In the Indian context, this global aspiration is grounded in a dense legislative and policy architecture. The Rehabilitation Council of India (RCI) Act of 1992, the Persons with Disabilities (Equal Opportunities, Protection of Rights, and Full Participation) Act of 1995, the National Trust Act of 1999, the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act of 2009, the RPWD Act of 2016, and most recently the NEP 2020, collectively constitute a robust framework for protecting the educational rights of children with special needs (CWSN). The RCI, functioning under the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, is the principal regulatory authority overseeing professional training in special education and rehabilitation, maintaining the Central Rehabilitation Register (CRR) and ensuring continuous rehabilitation education (CRE) through periodic curricular revision.

Notwithstanding this legislative scaffolding, the ground-level reality of special education teacher preparation in India reveals significant lacunae. The B.Ed. Special Education program, which is the foundational professional qualification for special educators, continues to face challenges related to curricular design, quality of field experience, faculty competency, and institutional infrastructure. Empirical studies conducted across Delhi and other Indian states consistently point to a gap between policy intent and programmatic outcomes—a gap that ultimately disadvantages the estimated 30.28 lakh CWSN who depend on trained, competent educators for their educational inclusion (MHRD, 2011).

This review paper addresses this gap by systematically examining the extant literature on three core dimensions: the structural adequacy of B.Ed. Special Education curricula; teacher awareness, attitudes, and preparedness for inclusive classrooms; and the quality and outcomes of school internship programs as formative sites of professional learning. By synthesizing evidence from Indian and international contexts, this paper aims to generate actionable insights for curriculum reform, institutional policy, and future research agendas.

## **2. Theoretical and Policy Framework**

The conceptual architecture of this review rests on three intersecting frameworks: the disability rights paradigm, the inclusive education philosophy, and the reflective practitioner

model of teacher education. The disability rights paradigm, encoded in the UNCRPD and domestically operationalized through the RPWD Act 2016, positions disability as a social construct shaped by environmental barriers rather than individual deficits. This paradigm shift has profound implications for teacher education: it demands that educators be trained not merely in disability-specific instructional techniques but in creating barrier-free learning environments and advocating for systemic equity.

Inclusive education, as defined by UNESCO (1994) in the Salamanca Statement and elaborated by Thomas (1997) and Julka (2001), refers to a systemic process of restructuring schools and curricula to accommodate the full diversity of learners within mainstream settings. Florian (2021) demonstrates that inclusive education has evolved into a central pillar of SDG4, requiring teacher preparation programs to instill both philosophical commitment and pedagogical competence. The integration of these principles into the B.Ed. Special Education curriculum is therefore not optional but constitutive.

The reflective practitioner model, associated with Schön (1983) and operationalized in teacher education through frameworks such as NCFTE 2009, holds that professional learning deepens when practitioners engage in systematic inquiry into their own practice. School internship programs are the primary institutional mechanism through which pre-service teachers develop reflective capacity. However, as the literature demonstrates, the realization of this potential depends critically on the quality of mentoring, the duration of field exposure, and the degree of theory-practice integration within the curriculum.

### **3. Curricular Structure and Quality Concerns in B.Ed. Special Education**

#### ***3.1 Historical Evolution of Special Education in India***

India's engagement with formal special education dates to the nineteenth century: the first school for the deaf was established in Bombay in 1883, followed by a school in Amritsar in 1887. The concept of integrated education gained momentum in the 1950s through initiatives by the Christopher Blind Mission and the Royal Commonwealth Society for the Blind. The government's Integrated Education for Disabled Children (IEDC) program, launched in December 1974, and its successor Project Integrated Education for the Disabled (PIED, 1987), implemented in partnership with UNICEF, marked significant institutional commitments to mainstreaming CWSN.

The PWD Act (1995) constituted a watershed in this evolution, mandating free and compulsory education for CWSN in non-discriminatory settings until age eighteen, and requiring state governments to support special school infrastructure, vocational training, and disability-

sensitive curriculum development. By the early 2000s, India had more than 3,200 special schools, and inclusive education had been formally integrated into national programs including the District Primary Education Programme (DPEP) and Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA). The establishment of NCTE in 1973 and its subsequent expansion of the B.Ed. program from one to two years reflects an evolving recognition that teacher education requires sustained, rigorous preparation.

### ***3.2 Curricular Gaps and Reform Imperatives***

Despite this historical progress, empirical literature consistently documents persistent inadequacies in the structure and content of B.Ed. Special Education programs. Darling-Hammond (2000) argues that the quality of teacher education is the single most important determinant of student learning outcomes, yet many programs remain disproportionately oriented toward theoretical knowledge acquisition at the expense of practical, competency-based training. The Committee for Review of National Policy on Education (1990), chaired by Acharya Ramamurti, identified a constellation of systemic weaknesses: inadequate practicum duration, weak university-school linkages, assessment procedures detached from curricular objectives, and the absence of reflective practice components.

The NCTE's National Curriculum Framework for Teacher Education (NCFTE 2009) further acknowledges that current programs inadequately develop the attitudinal, dispositional, and contextual dimensions of teacher readiness, focusing excessively on content transmission rather than professional identity formation. This critique is amplified in the context of special education, where the demands of individualized instruction, assistive technology, behavior management, and family collaboration require practical fluency that cannot be developed through classroom lectures alone. Ahmad Malik et al. (2019) documented, in a case study of District Doda, that in-service teachers' awareness of inclusive education practices was alarmingly low, suggesting that initial teacher preparation had not been transformative.

The revised B.Ed. Special Education curricula, developed in alignment with RPWD Act 2016 and NEP 2020, seek to address these gaps by introducing awareness modules on all 21 recognized disabilities, courses on educational bilingualism, Braille, Indian Sign Language, orientation mobility, and an employability module linked to life skills. However, the implementation fidelity of these curriculum revisions across institutions in Delhi—particularly in terms of faculty competency, resource adequacy, and assessment quality—remains underexplored in the empirical literature.

## **4. Teacher Awareness, Attitudes, and Preparedness for Inclusive Education**

#### ***4.1 Evidence from Indian Studies***

A rich body of domestic research has examined the knowledge, attitudes, and preparedness of B.Ed. trainees and in-service teachers toward inclusive education. Tiwari et al. (2015) conducted semi-structured interviews with fifteen high school teachers in Delhi and found that their general knowledge of inclusive education was insufficient, and their attitudes were frequently unfavorable, shaped by a lack of institutional support and limited familiarity with practical inclusion strategies. This resonates with findings by Ahmad Malik et al. (2019), who reported that teachers in District Doda lacked both awareness and confidence in managing CWSN within mainstream classrooms.

Pingle (2015) examined the impact of inclusive education awareness programs on pre-service teachers using a quasi-experimental design. The experimental group, comprising 77 pre-service teachers, developed moderate levels of awareness following the intervention, indicating that structured awareness programs can produce measurable change. However, Pingle also found no significant interaction effects between social intelligence, emotional intelligence, and socioeconomic status—suggesting that awareness development may require more individualized, contextually sensitive approaches. Sharma et al. (studies cited in thesis) documented that while B.Ed. candidates showed positive attitudes toward inclusion in principle, their self-efficacy for inclusive classroom management remained low.

Gupta and Rakwal (2020) surveyed B.Ed. trainees' perceptions of the two-year B.Ed. program and found mixed views: while many acknowledged the program's theoretical comprehensiveness, a substantial proportion felt inadequately prepared for the practical demands of diverse classrooms, including those with CWSN. This disconnect between theoretical knowledge and practical readiness constitutes one of the most persistently documented findings in the Indian teacher education literature.

#### ***4.2 Evidence from International Studies***

Comparative evidence from international contexts reinforces and contextualizes these findings. Adams et al. (2021) studied the readiness of 628 teachers across 77 government schools in the Maldives for inclusive education, finding that while teachers possessed moderate conceptual understanding, their practical skills for working with CWSN were low. The study demonstrated that gender, teaching experience, and professional training all significantly influenced preparedness, underscoring the importance of sustained, competency-based professional development rather than episodic awareness workshops.

Opoku, Cuskelly, Pedersen, and Rayner (2020) applied the Theory of Planned Behavior to examine the attitudes and self-efficacy of 457 secondary teachers in Ghana toward inclusive education implementation. Their findings revealed that while teachers held generally positive attitudes, they perceived insufficient institutional support from school administration, and there was no significant correlation between perceived social norms and intention to implement inclusive practices. This behavioral gap—between attitude and action—is a recurring theme in the global literature on teacher inclusion.

Opoku et al. (2022) extended this analysis to a cross-national sample of 975 parents in Ghana and Nigeria, finding that while parental attitudes toward inclusive education were positive, their awareness of specific inclusive education programs and policies remained low. This suggests that the challenge of inclusive education is systemic, extending beyond the classroom to encompass community and familial dimensions. Zabeli and Gjelaj (2020) reported similar patterns among preschool teachers in Kosovo, finding that while general awareness was widespread, the specific pedagogical skills needed to support CWSN were absent.

Florian (2021) provides an important meta-analytical perspective, tracing the global evolution of teacher preparation for inclusive education and arguing that progress requires consensus on a common set of professional competencies and disposition markers. Without such consensus, teacher education programs remain inconsistent in their outcomes, producing graduates who are philosophically committed to inclusion but practically underprepared to realize it. Pasha, Yousaf, and Ijaz (2021) corroborate this in their study of Pakistani pre-service teachers, finding that most understood the architecture of inclusive education but lacked skills to translate this understanding into individualized, differentiated instructional practice.

## **5. School Internship Programs: Structure, Outcomes, and Challenges**

### ***5.1 The Role of Internship in Teacher Professional Development***

School internships are the cornerstone of professional learning in teacher education, providing the experiential foundation upon which theoretical knowledge is built and tested. NCFTE (2009) recommends a structured teaching practice of four days per week over twelve to twenty weeks, encompassing classroom instruction, case analysis, peer evaluation, and instructional material development. However, empirical evidence across India consistently documents a gap between this normative standard and institutional reality.

Butler and Cuenca (2012) identify mentoring as the pivotal mediating factor in internship effectiveness, arguing that the quality of mentor-mentee relationships determines whether pre-service teachers develop genuine reflective capacity or merely replicate surface-level

instructional behaviors. The Indian literature confirms this: B.Ed. trainees who reported high-quality mentoring from cooperating school teachers demonstrated significantly greater self-efficacy, lesson planning competence, and classroom management skills than those who received minimal or passive supervision.

### ***5.2 Indian Evidence on Internship Experiences***

Jain (2015) conducted a normative survey of one hundred B.Ed. trainees to examine attitude change before and after school internship, finding that female student teachers showed greater positive shifts in their orientation toward teaching following field experience. This gender-differentiated outcome merits further investigation, particularly in the context of special education, where empathetic responsiveness is a professional imperative.

Patel (2019) documented the perceptions and experiences of B.Ed. students regarding internship and sessional work, finding that while most considered the experience valuable for developing practical competencies, a significant proportion felt underprepared for the reality of classrooms containing CWSN. The absence of disability-specific training during the internship was identified as a critical gap. Studies analyzed in the thesis reveal that while B.Ed. trainees generally found school internships to be substantially beneficial (mean perception score  $M=142.31$ ), the gap analysis across internship dimensions showed that thirty items on the internship scale had negative gap means—signifying that pre-internship expectations were not met—against only fifteen items with positive gap means.

Gupta and Rakwal (2020) highlighted that trainees enrolled in the two-year B.Ed. program valued the extended duration of the program in theory but found that institutional structures did not always support genuine theory-practice integration during field placements. Teacher educators maintained formal links with cooperating school headmasters but these relationships often lacked the depth required for meaningful professional mentoring.

### ***5.3 International Evidence on Internship Quality***

Yawson et al. (2021) studied reflective practices of 180 final-year student teachers in Ghana and found that the school internship produced significant gains in teaching confidence and pedagogical competence, particularly when reflective journaling and peer observation were systematically integrated. Chukwurah and Chukwurah (2021) examined 218 student teachers in Nigeria and identified institutional barriers—including inadequate funding for college placements and poor school distribution—as significant moderators of internship quality.

Hora, Parrott, and Her (2020) investigated how 57 American college students conceptualized their internship experience and found that the domains of learning, relational connection, and knowledge application were the most frequently cited dimensions of internship value. This highlights the social and relational dimensions of internship that are often undervalued in Indian programs focused on lesson delivery as the primary performance metric. Adams, Koster, and Brok (2020) demonstrated, through analysis of classroom management during school internship, that relationship-building with students is a foundational competency for effective classroom management a finding with direct implications for special education practice.

Tindowen et al. (2019) assessed sixty-two pre-service teachers' perceptions of their internship program in Saint Louis and found that interactions with cooperating teachers were the most highly rated dimension of the experience, underscoring once more the centrality of mentoring quality to internship outcomes. Filiz and Durnali (2019) found that Turkish pre-service teachers valued the practical internship session for career preparation but noted the absence of theory-practice bridges within the program itself.

## **6. Synthesis and Discussion**

The convergence of Indian and international evidence presents a coherent narrative of institutional aspiration constrained by structural insufficiency. Across diverse geographic, cultural, and systemic contexts, the literature reveals four recurring themes that define the current state of B.Ed. Special Education teacher preparation.

First, a persistent theory-practice disjunction characterizes teacher education programs globally. Curricula are often designed around content transmission rather than competency development, producing graduates who articulate inclusive education principles without the practical fluency to realize them in complex, resource-constrained classroom environments. This disjunction is amplified in special education, where individualized instruction, assistive technology, and behavioral support require embodied expertise that cannot be acquired through academic study alone.

Second, mentoring quality emerges as a decisive determinant of internship effectiveness. Where mentoring relationships are structured, sustained, and reciprocal, pre-service teachers develop greater self-efficacy, reflective capacity, and professional identity. Where mentoring is incidental or superficial, the transformative potential of field experience remains unrealized. Indian teacher education institutions must systematically invest in the professional development of cooperating school teachers as mentors, not merely supervisors.

Third, the awareness and attitudinal dimensions of inclusive education are measurably improvable through structured interventions, as Pingle (2015) and others have demonstrated. This suggests that program-level redesign incorporating experiential learning modules, case-based pedagogy, and structured contact with CWSN can produce meaningful shifts in pre-service teacher readiness. However, attitude change alone is insufficient: institutional and environmental enablers—including administrative support, reduced class sizes, and barrier-free infrastructure—are equally necessary for inclusive education to move from aspiration to practice (Opoku et al., 2020; Tiwari et al., 2015).

Fourth, the policy landscape in India provides an exceptionally strong foundation for reform. The RPWD Act 2016, with its recognition of 21 categories of disability and its alignment with UNCRPD principles, and NEP 2020, with its commitment to inclusive, equitable, and quality education, together constitute a mandate for transformative change in B.Ed. Special Education. The challenge lies in translating this mandate into curriculum design, pedagogical practice, and institutional accountability—tasks that require coordinated action by RCI, NCTE, state governments, and teacher education institutions.

## **7. Recommendations for Policy and Practice**

Based on the synthesis of evidence, the following recommendations are advanced for the reform of B.Ed. Special Education programs in India, with particular reference to Delhi state.

Curriculum redesign must prioritize experiential and competency-based learning, reducing the proportion of purely theoretical coursework and expanding practicum duration to a minimum of twenty weeks in diverse settings, as recommended by NCFTE (2009). Curricula should explicitly address all 21 disabilities recognized under the RPWD Act 2016, with differentiated modules on assistive technology, augmentative and alternative communication, and collaborative IEP development.

Structured mentoring frameworks must be institutionalized. Teacher education programs should formally train cooperating school teachers in mentoring competencies, establish clear protocols for pre- and post-observation conferences, and develop systems for tracking mentee progress across the internship cycle. The involvement of experienced special educators as mentors in field placements should be mandated, not optional.

Reflective practice must be systematically embedded within the internship curriculum. Portfolios, reflective journals, case study analyses, and peer learning circles should constitute formal assessment components of the practicum, evaluated by both faculty supervisors and

cooperating school mentors. This would align Indian practice with international evidence on what makes internships professionally transformative (Yawson et al., 2021; Hora et al., 2020).

State-level accountability mechanisms should be established to monitor the implementation fidelity of the revised B.Ed. Special Education curricula across all affiliated institutions in Delhi. Annual program reviews, outcome-based accreditation standards linked to RCI requirements, and transparent publication of quality indicators would create the institutional incentives necessary to drive continuous improvement.

## 8. Conclusion

This review has demonstrated that the quality of B.Ed. Special Education programs in India, and particularly in Delhi state, is shaped by a complex interplay of legislative mandates, curricular design choices, institutional capacities, and pedagogical traditions. The evidence base is both extensive and coherent: teacher preparation programs must move decisively from knowledge transmission to competency development, from incidental mentoring to structured professional apprenticeship, and from aspirational policy to accountable institutional practice.

Children with special needs in India—estimated at over 30 lakh—have a constitutionally guaranteed right to education. The quality of that education depends, above all, on the quality of the teachers who serve them. Investing in the rigorous, reflective, and rights-aligned preparation of special educators is therefore not a programmatic preference but a moral and legal imperative. The insights synthesized in this review provide a principled foundation for the curriculum reform, institutional redesign, and policy action that this imperative demands.

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