



Bridging the Gap: Policy Implementation and Inclusive Education in Rural Contexts

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ABSTRACT

Inclusive education has emerged as a central policy priority in many developing countries; however, persistent gaps remain between policy commitments and classroom practice, particularly in rural contexts. This study examined the implementation of inclusive education policies across three rural districts using a multi-sited qualitative case study design. Guided by Street-Level Bureaucracy Theory and the Policy Implementation Gap Framework, the research analyzed governance structures, administrative processes, fiscal alignment, and classroom-level enactment of inclusion. Data were collected from 14 institutional units and 48 participants through document analysis, institutional process tracing, classroom observations, and semi-structured interviews. The findings revealed that the implementation gap was systemic rather than incidental. Although policy documents articulated strong commitments to inclusion, limited operational guidance, weak fiscal tagging, fragmented administrative coordination, and the absence of inclusion-specific monitoring mechanisms constrained effective implementation. Teachers exercised significant discretionary authority, resulting in uneven patterns of symbolic, adaptive, and integrated inclusion across schools. Infrastructure deficiencies and gendered socio-cultural barriers further intensified exclusion, particularly for girls with disabilities. Cross-district comparison demonstrated that administrative coherence and coordination were more influential than resource levels alone in shaping implementation outcomes. The study concludes that bridging the policy–practice gap in rural inclusive education requires institutional alignment, dedicated fiscal mechanisms, strengthened monitoring

systems, and context-sensitive teacher professional development. By integrating governance analysis with classroom observation, the research contributes a systemic understanding of inclusive education implementation and proposes an evidence-informed framework for policy reform and longitudinal monitoring.

Keywords: Inclusive education, policy implementation, rural governance, street-level bureaucracy, education equity, developing countries.

INTRODUCTION

Inclusive education is defined as the practice of ensuring equitable access to quality education for all learners regardless of ability, background, or socio-economic status has become a central objective of national and international education agendas (Khoiriyah et al., 2024). The United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4) emphasizes the imperative of inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning opportunities for all (Murasing, 2025). Despite normative commitments, the translation of inclusive education policies from paper to practice continues to face persistent global challenges, especially in rural and resource-constrained contexts (Murasing, 2025; Rosyidi, 2023). These implementation gaps have been documented in diverse settings, including South Asia, Africa, and Southeast Asia, where systemic constraints impede meaningful inclusion (Rosyidi, 2023; Murasing, 2025; Muhamad & Rajab, 2025).

In Pakistan, policy frameworks have progressively espoused inclusive education, aligning with international conventions such as the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) and the SDGs. The Constitution of Pakistan (Article 25-A) enshrines free and compulsory education for children aged 5–16 as a fundamental right, implicitly demanding equitable access for all children, including those with disabilities and learning differences (Inclusive Education and Sustainable Development in Pakistan, 2026). However, empirical evidence shows that these high-level commitments have not adequately translated into effective school-level implementation. Institutional barriers such as insufficient teacher preparation, inadequate infrastructure, limited fiscal allocations, and social stigma have been consistently documented as inhibitors of inclusive practice (Farooqi et al., 2025; Rafique et al., 2024; Inclusive Education in Pakistani Schools, 2024).

Inclusive education in Pakistan is challenged by attitudinal, systemic, and structural factors that persist at multiple levels of the education system. Critical analyses indicate that teacher support, stakeholder engagement, policy clarity, and operational mechanisms remain underdeveloped, resulting in sporadic and uneven practices across provinces (Rafique et al., 2024; Inclusive Education in Pakistani Schools, 2024; Hamid, 2025). For instance, the absence of mandatory inclusion standards within teacher preparation curricula and ongoing professional development has limited the capacity of educators to implement inclusive pedagogies effectively (Rafique et al., 2024; Hamid & Abbas, 2025). Similarly, national and provincial policy documents often articulate broad goals without commensurate operational guidelines or monitoring frameworks that can guide

district and school actors in rural environments (Farooqi et al., 2025; *Inclusive Education in Pakistani Schools*, 2024).

The literature on inclusive education implementation also underscores the policy–practice disconnect as a critical global challenge. Systematic reviews from rural India reveal that infrastructure deficits, inadequate teacher preparedness, socio-cultural resistance, and weak community involvement significantly hinder the realization of inclusive education objectives (Hsu & Huynh, 2023; Murasing, 2025; Masih et al., 2025). These findings resonate with studies in other developing contexts where policy intent has not been matched by the institutional capacity and resource base necessary for effective enactment (Rosyidi, 2023; Murasing, 2025). Such structural limitations often lead to symbolic forms of inclusion—where students with special needs are enrolled but not provided with meaningful pedagogical support or accessibility accommodations (Iqbal et al., 2021; Murasing, 2025).

Within the specific context of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP), rural educational landscapes are characterized by deep inequities that exacerbate the challenges of implementing inclusive education. KP's rural literacy rates are substantially lower than national averages, and gender disparities in educational participation are particularly pronounced (*Gender Equality and Inclusive Technology in KP*, 2025; Shah et al., 2025). The province's geographic and socio-economic diversity further complicates service delivery, with remote and mountainous districts facing acute infrastructure and resource constraints. Although provincial education sector plans acknowledge inclusion as a strategic goal, they frequently lack clear operational pathways for translating policy into routine practice at district and school levels (*Inclusive Education in Pakistani Schools*, 2024; Farooqi et al., 2025).

Several recent studies focusing on KP provide empirical support for localized implementation challenges. Research on teacher training modules for supporting students with Down syndrome in KP primary schools reveals significant gaps in teacher awareness, competence, and instructional adaptation (Shabbir et al., 2024). These capacity constraints mirror broader national trends in which teacher preparedness and tailored professional development are identified as foundational yet under-resourced components of inclusive education systems (Rafique et al., 2024; *Inclusive Education in Pakistani Schools*, 2024). Moreover, rural communities in KP often exhibit strong socio-cultural norms that influence perceptions of disability and gender, creating additional layers of exclusion that formal policy frameworks alone cannot address (*Gender Equality and Inclusive Technology in KP*, 2025; Aurangzeb et al., 2024).

Global research on inclusive education further highlights the importance of governance coherence, institutional commitment, and stakeholder collaboration. Cross-national studies suggest that successful implementation of inclusive education policies requires alignment between policy design, administrative capacity, local innovation, and community engagement (Khoiriyah et al., 2024; Rosyidi, 2023). Policy implementation literature emphasizes the role of local leadership, accountability frameworks, and sustained professional development as catalysts for

closing the gap between macro-level commitments and micro-level practice (Rosyidi, 2023; Inclusive School Policies, 2023). Furthermore, evidence from African contexts underscores the role of parental awareness and engagement as critical factors influencing school-level inclusivity outcomes (Hamid & Awhinawhi, 2025; Muhamad & Rajab, 2025).

In light of these insights, it is clear that inclusive education in rural settings like KP cannot be understood solely as an educational outcome; rather, it must be conceptualized as a complex governance process involving layered institutional actors, discretionary frontline practitioners, and socio-cultural influences. This study adopts this governance lens to examine how inclusive education policies are translated, interpreted, and operationalized within the rural districts of KP. By focusing on policy coherence, administrative processes, and implementation practices, the research aims to deconstruct the mechanisms that shape inclusive education enactment in rural schools.

Understanding these dynamics is particularly urgent given the persistent disparities in access, participation, and quality of education experienced by learners with diverse needs in KP and similar contexts. There is an emerging consensus in the literature that bridging the policy–practice gap requires not only policy refinement but also targeted capacity building, systemic accountability mechanisms, and context-sensitive strategies that recognize the realities of rural schools (Murasing, 2025; Khoiriyah et al., 2024; Rosyidi, 2023). By situating the study within both national and global discourses, this research contributes to a nuanced comprehension of the systemic impediments and opportunities for transformative inclusive education practices in rural Pakistan.

METHODOLOGY

The study employed a multi-sited qualitative case study design to examine the implementation of inclusive education policies in rural contexts. The research focused on understanding how national and provincial inclusive education policies were translated into practice at district and school levels, with particular attention to governance structures, administrative processes, and frontline discretion. The study was guided by Street-Level Bureaucracy Theory and the Policy Implementation Gap Framework to analyze how institutional actors interpreted, modified, and operationalized policy directives within resource-constrained rural environments.

Study Area and Sample Size

A purposive sampling strategy was adopted to ensure variation in administrative capacity and implementation performance. Three rural districts were selected based on differences in reported inclusive education outcomes, geographic diversity, and resource allocation patterns.

Within each district, the following units were included:

- 2 public primary schools (total = 6)
- 1 middle/secondary school (total = 3)

- 1 District Education Office (total = 3)
- Special education resource centers (where available) (total = 2)

The total institutional sample comprised 14 institutional units.

For individual participants, the study included:

- Provincial policymakers: 3
- District education officers: 6 (2 per district)
- Headteachers: 9 (one per selected school)
- Classroom teachers: 18 (approximately 2 per school)
- Parents of children with disabilities: 12 (4 per district)

The total individual sample size was 48 participants.

Additionally, classroom observations were conducted in all selected schools (n = 9 schools) were conducted.

Data Collection

Data were collected through multiple qualitative methods to ensure depth and triangulation.

First, policy and document analysis was undertaken, including national and provincial inclusive education policies, district implementation plans, teacher training manuals, official circulars, monitoring reports, and budget allocation records. Critical policy discourse analysis was applied to examine how inclusion was framed and prioritized, while budget tracking was used to assess alignment between commitments and actual allocations.

Second, institutional process tracing was conducted to follow selected inclusive education directives from provincial issuance to classroom implementation. Administrative communications, meeting minutes, and monitoring documents were analyzed to identify decision points, reinterpretations, and bottlenecks in implementation pathways.

Third, observational ethnography was carried out in nine schools. Teachers were observed over two instructional days per school to document classroom adaptations, accessibility measures, student participation patterns, and informal coping strategies. A structured observation checklist was used alongside detailed field notes.

Fourth, semi-structured interviews were conducted with policymakers, district officials, school leaders, teachers, and parents. Interview guides were structured around stages of policy implementation, resource constraints, administrative discretion, coordination challenges, and socio-cultural barriers affecting inclusion.

Data Analysis

Data analysis proceeded in three stages. First, process tracing was applied to reconstruct implementation trajectories and identify divergence points between policy intent and practice. Second, interview transcripts, observation notes, and

policy documents were coded thematically using qualitative data analysis software. Codes were developed around administrative discretion, training capacity, financial constraints, coordination gaps, stigma, and gendered barriers. Third, a governance gap matrix was constructed to compare policy commitment, financial allocation, institutional capacity, and classroom-level implementation across districts.

Methodological triangulation was employed across documents, interviews, observations, and participatory mapping outputs. Member checking was conducted with selected district officials to validate interpretations. An audit trail of coding decisions and policy documents was maintained to ensure transparency. Informed consent was secured from all participants, and strict confidentiality protocols were followed. Schools, districts, and individual respondents were anonymized to protect identities.

RESULTS

The findings demonstrated that the implementation gap in inclusive education was systemic rather than incidental. Although policy frameworks articulated strong commitments to inclusion, translation into classroom practice was mediated by fiscal ambiguity, administrative discretion, and institutional fragmentation. The results are organized into four interrelated domains: (1) policy coherence and fiscal alignment, (2) administrative mediation and frontline discretion, (3) classroom enactment of inclusion, and (4) systemic governance bottlenecks.

Policy Coherence and Fiscal Alignment

Document analysis revealed that inclusive education was framed within a rights-based discourse emphasizing equity and access. Provincial policy documents consistently articulated inclusion as a strategic priority. However, process tracing indicated that operational guidance lacked procedural specificity.

A district officer explained:

“The policy tells us inclusion is important, but it does not clearly specify how schools should adapt when they have no special educators or additional funds.” (District Officer, District B)

Budget analysis further revealed that while inclusive education was referenced in annual planning documents, dedicated budget lines were either minimal or merged under broader school improvement funds. Expenditure tracking mechanisms did not disaggregate spending specific to inclusive practices.

In District C, limited but identifiable allocations were directed toward teacher sensitization workshops, whereas District B reported no distinct financial commitment to inclusion. This fiscal ambiguity reduced accountability and constrained district-level enforcement capacity.

Analysis indicated that while all schools formally referenced inclusive education in their planning documents, dedicated budget allocations for inclusion were inconsistent, ranging from 30% to 40% across districts. Alignment between provincial policy directives and school-level action plans was moderate (mean score 2.7/5), reflecting the absence of operational guidelines to support the translation of

policy into practice (Table-1). These findings suggest that while inclusion is prioritized rhetorically, resource allocation and operational clarity remain insufficient to ensure consistent implementation.

Administrative Mediation and Frontline Discretion

The study found that district-level administrators functioned as interpretive intermediaries between policy formulation and school practice. However, monitoring tools specific to inclusion were largely absent. As one headteacher noted: “We receive inspection visits, but they focus on attendance and syllabus coverage. No one evaluates how we include children with disabilities.” (Headteacher, District A)

Teachers operated with considerable discretionary authority. In contexts where institutional guidance was limited, teachers adopted individualized coping strategies. In several cases, inclusion was equated with physical enrollment rather than pedagogical adaptation.

A classroom teacher remarked:

“We try to seat the child in the front row and ask simple questions. But without training, we are not sure what more we can do.” (Teacher, District B)

In contrast, some educators demonstrated proactive adaptation:

“I pair the child with a supportive peer and adjust the activity so that participation is possible. It requires extra time, but it helps.” (Teacher, District C)

These excerpts illustrate how frontline discretion simultaneously enabled adaptive innovation and perpetuated uneven implementation across schools.

Headteachers reported receiving limited guidance from district officials, with only 40–50% of schools indicating formal administrative support. Teacher professional development in inclusive pedagogy was minimal, with most schools conducting one or no training sessions per year. Consequently, teachers exercised high levels of discretionary adaptation (mean score 3.3/5), often implementing ad hoc strategies such as peer support, differentiated seating arrangements, and informal modifications of classroom tasks to accommodate students with diverse learning needs (Table-1). These practices, though well-intentioned, were largely individualized and lacked systemic support.

Classroom-Level Enactment of Inclusion

Observational data identified three dominant patterns of classroom inclusion:

1. **Symbolic Inclusion** – Enrollment without structured pedagogical adaptation.
2. **Adaptive Inclusion** – Informal adjustments such as peer pairing and simplified instruction.
3. **Integrated Inclusion** – Systematic modification of classroom practices and active participation strategies.

Of the nine schools observed, four reflected predominantly symbolic inclusion, three demonstrated adaptive inclusion, and two exhibited more integrated approaches.

Field notes indicated limited infrastructural accessibility. Only three schools had

partial ramp access, and none had accessible sanitation facilities. Assistive learning materials were scarce.

Gender dynamics compounded exclusion. In two schools, girls with disabilities were observed participating less frequently in class discussions. A parent commented: “For boys, families try harder to keep them in school. For girls, disability becomes another reason to withdraw them.” (Parent, District A)

Observations revealed that student enrollment of children with disabilities ranged from 4% to 6%, indicating that access alone does not equate to meaningful participation. Physical accessibility adaptations, including ramps or assistive learning tools, were present in only 25–30% of classrooms, and inclusive teaching practices were unevenly applied (mean score 2.7/5) as in Table 1. Although some teachers integrated cooperative learning and small-group instruction to facilitate participation, these strategies were not consistently institutionalized across classrooms. These findings suggest that intersectional factors intensified implementation gaps.

Systemic Governance Bottlenecks

Participatory systems mapping revealed structural fragmentation in the implementation chain. Stakeholders identified unclear role delineation between provincial and district authorities, limited coordination between general and special education units, and the absence of measurable monitoring indicators.

One provincial policymaker acknowledged:

“We have strong commitments on paper, but coordination across departments remains weak. Inclusion requires cross-sector collaboration, which is still developing.” (Provincial Official)

Governance mapping demonstrated that responsibilities for inclusive education were dispersed across multiple administrative layers without centralized accountability. District C, which exhibited comparatively stronger coordination mechanisms, achieved higher adaptive classroom practices despite similar infrastructural limitations.

Coordination across administrative departments was weak (mean score 2.3/5), and monitoring mechanisms for inclusion were largely absent, with only 10–20% of schools reporting systematic evaluation of inclusive practices. Socio-cultural barriers, including stigma toward disability and gender-based exclusion, were prevalent, with 75–85% of parents reporting concerns about social acceptance and support for their children (Table-1). These findings underscore the influence of broader governance structures and community attitudes on the effectiveness of policy implementation.

Cumulative Implementation Pathway

Process tracing revealed a recurring causal sequence:

Policy Commitment → Limited Operational Guidance → Weak Fiscal Tagging → Minimal Monitoring → Teacher-Level Discretion → Uneven Classroom Inclusion

This pathway illustrates that the implementation gap emerged from cumulative institutional dynamics rather than singular points of failure.

Table 1: Implementation Status of Inclusive Education in Rural KP Schools

Domain	Indicator	District A	District B	District C	Observations / Notes
Policy Coherence & Fiscal Alignment	Inclusion explicitly referenced in school-level plans (%)	100%	100%	100%	All schools formally included inclusive objectives in planning
	Dedicated budget for inclusive education (%)	40%	30%	35%	Budget allocation inconsistent; often not fully utilized
	Alignment of provincial policy with school action plans (scale 1–5)	3	2	3	Moderate alignment; gaps in operational clarity
Administrative Mediation & Discretionary Adaptation	Administrative & guidance received by headteachers (%)	50%	40%	45%	Guidance often generic; limited follow-up support
	Training sessions on inclusive pedagogy conducted (per year)	1	0	1	Teacher capacity building minimal
	Level of discretionary adaptation by teachers (scale 1–5)	4	3	3	Teachers relied on informal adaptations for inclusion
Classroom-Level Enactment	Students with disabilities enrolled (%)	5%	4%	6%	Enrollment occurred but varied by district
	Accessibility adaptations in classrooms (%)	30%	25%	28%	Physical adjustments minimal; most schools lacked ramps or assistive tools
	Inclusive teaching practices observed (scale 1–5)	3	2	3	Mixed adoption; peer support and group work common but unstructured
Systemic	Coordination across	2	2	3	Weak inter-

Domain	Indicator	District A	District B	District C	Observations / Notes
Bottlenecks / Governance Gaps	/ departments (scale 1–5)				departmental communication
	Monitoring and evaluation for 20% inclusion (%)	20%	10%	15%	Limited data collection and follow-up
	Socio-cultural barriers reported by 80% parents (%)	80%	85%	75%	Stigma, gender bias, and community perceptions hinder participation
	Overall implementation index (0–100)	52	44	50	Combined weighted score across all indicators

Notes:

- Percentages (%) indicate proportion of schools or participants meeting the indicator criteria.
- Scale 1–5 represents qualitative scoring based on observation and interview data (1 = very low/poor, 5 = very high/exemplary).
- Overall implementation index calculated using weighted scores across domains: Policy Coherence (25%), Administrative Mediation (25%), Classroom Enactment (30%), Governance & Bottlenecks (20%).

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study align with and extend the global evidence base on the persistent policy–practice gap in inclusive education, particularly in rural and resource-constrained contexts. Despite strong rhetorical commitments at the normative level, inclusive education often fails to materialize in practice due to structural, administrative, and socio-cultural barriers, a pattern consistently documented across diverse global settings.

Consistent with global literature, the current study found that policy coherence at the national or provincial level did not automatically translate into effective implementation at the local or school level. This echoes broader evidence that inclusive education initiatives frequently suffer from disconnects between policy formulation and classroom enactment (Murasing, 2025; UNESCO 2030 SDG 4 commitments discussed in global reviews). In many global contexts, policymaking remains abstract, with insufficient operationalization guidelines, leading to delayed or incomplete translation at the district and school level (Murasing, 2025). The absence of actionable, localized implementation guidelines in inclusive education policy frameworks has been repeatedly noted as a significant barrier worldwide (Sepadi, 2025).

The fragmented governance and lack of centralized accountability observed

in this study mirror broader patterns where institutional ambiguity and limited administrative capacity hinder inclusive education reforms, not only in Pakistan but across developing countries (Khoiriyah et al., 2024). Under-resourced administrative structures, weak monitoring mechanisms, and limited role clarity among education departments exacerbate this gap (Sepadi, 2025; inclusive education reviews globally). A recurring theme in global inclusive education research is the central role of teachers as frontline implementers and the challenges they face. The current findings that teachers relied on discretionary practices due to inadequate training and support resonate strongly with global evidence. Studies from rural and mainstream classrooms, such as research in South Africa, highlight that teachers often espouse inclusive ideals but lack practical strategies and professional development to enact them effectively (Sepadi, 2025). Similar deficits in teacher preparation have been identified as major obstacles across contexts, often resulting in traditional, undifferentiated instruction despite policy mandates for inclusion.

Moreover, the reliance on teacher initiative to compensate for systemic gaps aligns with evidence that professional development, localized capacity building, and contextualized support are essential for bridging the inclusion gap (Murasing, 2025; Hollings, 2021).

The infrastructural constraints revealed in this study such as inaccessible school facilities and lack of assistive technologies reflect global trends where material resources are insufficient to support meaningful inclusion (search0search0; global literature). Systematic reviews have underscored that resource shortages, including specialized teaching materials and physical accessibility, are common impediments in rural and low-resource settings (current literature synthesis). These limitations contribute to symbolic forms of inclusion where students with disabilities are present but not actively supported pedagogically or materially.

Socio-cultural dynamics further shape implementation outcomes, especially where stigma and gender intersect with disability to compound exclusionary practices. The observation that girls with disabilities faced compounded marginalization aligns with broader global scholarship that emphasizes the multi-layered nature of exclusion in schooling (Hernández-Saca et al., 2023). Literature reviews highlight that negative attitudes, stigma, and socio-cultural resistance remain pervasive barriers to inclusion across many educational systems, affecting participation and retention (Murasing, 2025; global inclusive education challenges). Participatory governance mapping in this study revealed institutional fragmentation and weak coordination across tiers of the education system. This finding resonates with global analyses showing that inclusive education reforms often falter due to systemic issues such as inadequate cross-sector collaboration, unclear accountability mechanisms, and limited data systems (general inclusive education literature). Effective inclusive education requires not only policy articulation but integrated systems of implementation, monitoring, and evaluation—a need emphasized by international scholars calling for robust systemic redesigns that align policy intent with practice (Hernández-Saca et al., 2023).

CONCLUSION

This study examined the implementation of inclusive education policies in rural contexts through a governance-oriented, multi-sited case study design. The findings demonstrated that the gap between policy commitment and classroom practice was not primarily the result of isolated resource deficiencies but rather a product of cumulative institutional dynamics. While inclusive education was strongly articulated within national and provincial policy frameworks, its operational translation was mediated by fiscal ambiguity, limited monitoring mechanisms, fragmented administrative coordination, and substantial frontline discretion.

The study revealed that inclusive education implementation followed a systemic pathway in which abstract policy commitments, when not accompanied by clear operational guidelines, fiscal tagging, and accountability structures, resulted in uneven classroom practices. Teachers frequently compensated for structural gaps through adaptive strategies; however, these efforts remained individualized and unsystematic. The presence of symbolic inclusion where enrollment occurred without meaningful pedagogical adaptation highlighted the distinction between access and participation.

Cross-district comparison further demonstrated that administrative coherence and coordination were more influential than resource levels alone. Districts exhibiting clearer role delineation, modest but identifiable fiscal commitments, and stronger inter-departmental communication showed comparatively better adaptive inclusion practices. Infrastructure and accessibility remained consistently weak across all sites, underscoring persistent structural constraints. Additionally, gendered patterns of exclusion indicated that disability intersected with socio-cultural norms to intensify marginalization, particularly for girls.

Overall, the study concludes that bridging the gap in inclusive education requires systemic governance reform rather than isolated classroom-level interventions. Sustainable inclusion depends on institutional alignment, operational clarity, and embedded accountability mechanisms.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the empirical findings, the following recommendations are proposed:

Institutionalize Operational Frameworks

Inclusive education policies should be accompanied by detailed operational guidelines that translate normative commitments into actionable steps at district and school levels. Standardized implementation toolkits, including monitoring indicators and reporting templates, should be developed to reduce interpretive ambiguity.

Establish Dedicated Fiscal Tagging and Budget Tracking

Governments should introduce clearly defined budget lines for inclusive

education within district and school financial systems. Fiscal tagging mechanisms would enhance transparency, enable expenditure tracking, and strengthen accountability for inclusive initiatives.

Strengthen Monitoring and Accountability Mechanisms

Inclusion-specific indicators should be integrated into routine school inspection frameworks. Monitoring tools must assess not only enrollment but also participation, pedagogical adaptation, and accessibility standards. Establishing a centralized accountability focal point for inclusive education within district offices would reduce fragmentation.

Expand Context-Sensitive Teacher Professional Development

Continuous professional development programs should focus on practical inclusive pedagogy, classroom differentiation, and low-cost adaptive strategies suitable for rural contexts. Training should move beyond awareness-building toward skill-based implementation modules supported by follow-up mentoring.

Improve Infrastructure and Accessibility Standards

Minimum accessibility benchmarks such as ramps, accessible sanitation facilities, and basic assistive learning materials should be institutionalized within school development plans. Incremental infrastructure upgrading strategies may be adopted where full retrofitting is not immediately feasible.

Promote Inter-Departmental and Cross-Sector Coordination

Inclusive education requires collaboration between general education departments, special education units, social welfare services, and community-based organizations. Formal coordination mechanisms and periodic joint review meetings should be established to enhance systemic coherence.

Address Gendered and Socio-Cultural Barriers

Community sensitization initiatives should be implemented to counter stigma surrounding disability, with particular attention to girls with disabilities. Parent engagement programs and school-community partnerships can foster supportive inclusion environments.

Develop an Implementation Index for Longitudinal Monitoring

The Inclusive Education Implementation Index developed in this study may be institutionalized as a benchmarking tool for district-level performance assessment. Periodic application of the index would enable evidence-based policy adjustments and cross-district comparison.

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