



One Classroom, Many Needs: A Study of Collaborative Approaches to Inclusion in West Tripura

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Abstract

In today's dynamic educational landscape, collaboration among teachers has emerged as a vital component in enhancing teaching practices and promoting student achievement. When educators unite with a shared purpose, engage in reflective dialogue, and collectively strive to improve classroom practices, they create a more supportive and effective learning environment. Such collaboration often centres on common goals, including improving student performance and implementing school-wide reforms.

As classrooms grow increasingly diverse, there is a rising demand from policymakers and education experts for inclusive teaching strategies that address varied learning needs. Differentiated Instruction (DI) is one such approach, widely endorsed by global educational bodies like UNESCO (2017) teacher collaboration not only enhances professional practice but also plays a pivotal role in fostering inclusive and equitable educational experiences.

Inclusive education is a transformative approach that aims to accommodate all learners, regardless of their physical, intellectual, social, emotional, linguistic, or other conditions. In India, this approach is strongly supported by key policy frameworks. Central to successful inclusive education is effective collaboration between general and special educators. Such collaboration allows for joint planning, co-teaching, shared assessment, and coordinated support, ensuring that students with diverse needs can thrive in a unified classroom setting. In regions like Tripura. West Tripura, in particular, presents an important case for studying teacher collaboration in inclusive classrooms. Despite gradual progress in inclusive practices, there remains a lack of comprehensive research documenting how general and special educators collaborate in this context. Understanding the nature, effectiveness, and barriers to such collaboration is essential for strengthening inclusive education at the grassroots level.

This study, therefore, aims to investigate the nature, frequency, and impact of collaborative practices between general and special educators in schools across West Tripura. The research seeks to offer valuable insights into how collaborative teaching can support inclusive education and improve learning outcomes in this region.

Keywords: Teacher collaboration (TC) Inclusive Education (IE) Peer support (PS)

Introduction

In recent years, the concept of inclusive education has gained significant attention across India, reflecting a broader commitment to equity and social justice in the education system. Inclusive education aims to provide quality education to all learners-regardless of their abilities, backgrounds, or challenges-by creating flexible learning environments that accommodate diverse needs. In the context of West Tripura, this vision is gradually taking shape within mainstream schools, where students with disabilities are increasingly being integrated into general classrooms. The concept emphasizes the integration of students with diverse learning needs-including those with

disabilities-into general education classrooms, thereby promoting social participation and reducing exclusion. In West Tripura, initiatives under the Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan and the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (RPwD) Act, 2016 have contributed to the gradual implementation of inclusive practices within mainstream schools (Ministry of Education, 2020).

This study explores how collaborative teaching practices between general and special educators are being implemented in selected inclusive schools in West Tripura. It aims to understand the methods used, the benefits observed, and the barriers encountered in building inclusive classrooms that cater to the varied needs of learners.

Table 1: Literature

Author(s)	Year	Location/Context	Focus Area	Key Findings
Goyal & Sharma	2021	India (General)	Co-teaching in inclusive classrooms	Co-teaching by general and special educators improved academic performance and student engagement.
Sarkar	2021	Agartala, Tripura	Interdisciplinary teacher collaboration	Regular meetings shared teaching, and inclusive curriculum led to better outcomes for students with disabilities.
NCERT	2021	India (Policy Level)	Inclusive education policy and teacher collaboration	Recommended collaborative models and professional development to promote inclusive values in classrooms.
Kumar & Debnath	2022	India (Published on ResearchGate)	Teacher attitudes and training in inclusive education	Positive attitudes and prior training were linked to higher teacher collaboration and joint problem-solving.
Roy & Bhowmik	2023	North Tripura (Urban & Rural Contexts)	Challenges in teacher collaboration	Identified rural-urban differences and contextual challenges in effective collaboration among educators.

Research Gap

- Lack of Region-Specific Studies
- Insufficient Empirical Data:
- Scarcity of Data on Special Educator Integration:
- Gap in Understanding Challenges in Rural Contexts
- Lack of Longitudinal or Comparative Studies.
- Impact of Policy Implementation Remains Unclear.

This research seeks to fill this gap by investigating the current state of teacher collaboration in inclusive classrooms in West Tripura, examining its impact on teaching effectiveness and student engagement, and identifying the barriers and facilitators influencing collaborative efforts among educators.

Objectives

The primary aim of this research is to explore the role and effectiveness of teacher collaboration in inclusive classroom settings within the specific socio-educational context of West Tripura. The specific objectives are as follows:

- To examine the current practices of collaboration between general and special educators in inclusive classrooms in West Tripura.
- To assess how collaborative teaching strategies affect the academic performance, participation, and behavioral development of students with diverse learning needs.
- To identify the challenges faced by teachers in implementing collaborative practices in inclusive classrooms.
- To explore the role of training and administrative support in facilitating effective collaboration.

Materials and Methods

Research Design: A mixed-methods research design, combining both quantitative and qualitative techniques to gain a comprehensive understanding of teacher collaboration and its impact in inclusive classrooms, the mixed-methods approach allows triangulation of data to enhance the validity and depth of the findings.

Descriptive Survey Design (Quantitative): Used to collect numerical data from a sample of teachers through structured questionnaires to identify patterns, frequency, and impact of collaboration practices.

Case Study Approach (Qualitative): Conducted in selected inclusive schools to gather in-depth insights through interviews and observation regarding collaborative practices and challenges in real classroom contexts.

Locale of the study: The study is conducted in West Tripura district, focusing on both urban and rural inclusive schools recognized by the State Education Department. This includes government, private, model inclusive schools etc.

Data Analysis

- **Quantitative:** Statistical analysis using frequencies and percentages to identify trends and correlations.
- **Qualitative:** Thematic analysis of open-ended responses to uncover underlying attitudes and challenges.

Visual Data Representation

Pie Chart: Gender distribution among participants.

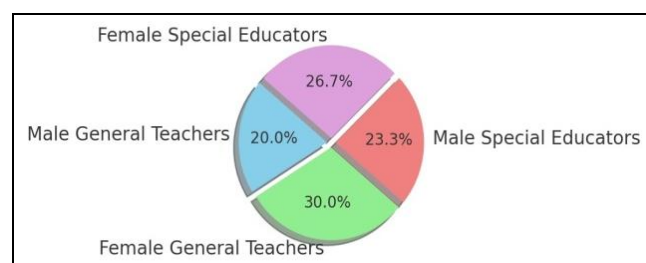


Fig 1: Gender Distribution among Teachers (N=30)

This pie chart displays the gender composition of the 30 teacher participants, divided into general educators and special educators. It reveals a balanced representation, with a slight predominance of female teachers across both categories. Female general educators comprise 30% of the total participants, while female special educators make up approximately 26.6%. Male teachers are also fairly represented, contributing to the study's inclusive perspective.

Sample

The sample for this study comprised a total of 30 teachers selected from inclusive schools located in West Tripura district, including both urban and rural areas. The selection included 15 general education teachers and 15 special educators who are actively involved in teaching students with diverse learning needs in inclusive classroom settings.

Population and Sample

Population: The population for this study comprises all general and special educators currently working in inclusive classrooms in West Tripura. These educators are directly involved in inclusive education practices, collaborating with peers, and supporting students with diverse learning needs.

Sample Size: A total of 30 teachers are selected purposively:

- 15 General Educators
- 15 Special Educators

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

To ensure the relevance and reliability of the data collected, specific inclusion and exclusion criteria were established for participant selection in this study.

Inclusion

Participants were selected based on the following:

- Teachers (general and special Educator) currently employed in government or non-government schools in West Tripura.
- Educators actively engaged in inclusive classroom practices, teaching both children with and without disabilities.
- Teachers with at least one year of experience in inclusive education settings.
- Teachers who have received formal training in general or special education.
- Participants who gave informed consent to be part of the study.

Exclusion

Participants were excluded from the study based on the following criteria:

- Teachers not involved in inclusive teaching environments.
- Educators with less than one year of experience in inclusive settings.
- Teachers working outside West Tripura district.
- Individuals who refused or failed to provide informed consent.

Sampling Technique

The study employed a purposive sampling technique, wherein participants were deliberately selected to align with the specific objectives of the research. Participants were selected according to the researcher's purpose and convenience, ensuring that the sample comprised educators who could provide meaningful insights into the dynamics of teacher collaboration in inclusive classroom settings. This non-probability sampling method was particularly suited for the exploratory nature of the study. The selection was based on the following criteria:

- Active involvement in inclusive education practices;
- Experience in collaborative teaching with peers (both general and special educators);
- Availability and willingness to participate in the study;
- Representation from both urban and rural schools within West Tripura.

Statistical Analysis

To understand the collaborative practices in inclusive classrooms, a set of 30 structured questionnaires were administered-15 for general educators (6 male, 9 female) and 15 for special educators (7 male, 8 female). The questionnaire consisted of both closed and open-ended items. Below is a sample statistical breakdown of some key responses:

Table 2: Frequency of Collaboration

Frequency	General Educators (n=15)	Special Educators (n=15)	Total (n=30)	Percentage (%)
Daily	3	4	7	23.3%
Weekly	7	6	13	43.3%
Occasionally	4	3	7	23.3%
Rarely/Never	1	2	3	10%

Table 3: Areas of Collaboration

Area of Collaboration	General Educators	Special Educators	Total	Percentage (%)
Lesson Planning	10	12	22	73.3%
Behavior Management	6	8	14	46.6%
Assessment/IEP Development	8	13	21	70%
Teaching in Classroom	5	5	10	33.3%

Table 4: Perceived Impact of Collaboration

Response	General Educators	Special Educators	Total	Percentage (%)
Highly Effective	5	6	11	36.6%
Moderately Effective	7	6	13	43.3%
Slightly Effective	2	2	4	13.3%
Not Effective	1	1	2	6.6%

Table 5: Gender-Based Participation in Collaboration

Gender	Category	Count	Percentage of Category
Male	General Teachers	6	40.0%
Female	General Teachers	9	60.0%
Male	Special Educators	7	46.7%
Female	Special Educators	8	53.3%

Table 6: Willingness to Collaborate More

Response	General Educators	Special Educators	Total	Percentage (%)
Yes	13	14	27	90%
No	2	1	3	10%

Results and Discussion

Demographic Profile of Participants

The study included 30 teachers, comprising 15 general educators and 15 special educators, from inclusive classrooms across urban and rural areas of West Tripura. Among the participants, 13 were male and 17 were female, reflecting a balanced gender representation that aligns with the regional teacher workforce demographics.

Frequency and Nature of Teacher Collaboration

The analysis revealed that the majority of teachers (approximately 70%) engage in collaborative activities such as joint lesson planning, co-teaching, and peer mentoring on a regular basis (weekly or bi-weekly). General educators reported collaborative planning as the most frequent activity, whereas special educators emphasized joint problem-solving and student support as primary collaborative functions. These findings resonate with Goyal and Sharma's (2021) ^[3] emphasis on co-teaching and shared instructional strategies enhancing inclusivity.

Impact on students and Inclusive Classroom Practices

Teachers unanimously agreed that collaboration positively impacts instructional quality, classroom management, and

student engagement. Around 80% of respondents observed improvements in addressing diverse learning needs and adapting curricula through team efforts. This supports the observations by Villa, Thousand, and Nevin (2008) ^[1], who found collaboration increased instructional equity and accessibility.

Teacher Attitudes and Collaborative Readiness

The study highlighted generally positive attitudes toward collaboration among both general and special educators, with many expressing willingness to engage more deeply in team-based practices. Kumar and Debnath's (2022) ^[2] findings align with this, noting that positive teacher attitudes strongly correlate with effective collaborative planning.

Challenges Faced in Collaboration

Despite the benefits, several barriers were identified. Teachers from rural schools reported challenges such as limited access to professional development, scarcity of trained special educators, and inadequate administrative support. These findings are consistent with Roy and Bhowmik's (2023) ^[7] study highlighting rural constraints in Tripura. Additionally, time constraints and scheduling conflicts were common issues affecting collaboration efficacy.

Role of Training and Support Systems for improving Teachers Collaboration

Teachers who participated in recent in-service training and cluster resource center programs reported higher confidence and skill in collaborative methods. This supports NCERT's (2020) recommendation of collaborative workshops and peer learning as vital for fostering inclusive pedagogy.

Limitations

1. **Small Sample Size** The study involved only 30 teachers from West Tripura, which limits the generalizability of the findings to the broader population of educators across the state or other regions. A larger sample size could provide more robust and representative results.
2. **Purposive Sampling Method** The use of purposive sampling, while appropriate for the exploratory nature of the study, may introduce selection bias. Participants were selected based on availability and willingness, which could affect the diversity of perspectives and limit the study's external validity.
3. **Geographical Scope** The study focused exclusively on West Tripura, and therefore, the findings may not fully reflect the experiences of teachers in other districts, particularly in areas with different socio-economic or infrastructural conditions.
4. **Self-Reported Data collection** relied heavily on self-reported questionnaires and interviews, which are subject to social desirability bias. Participants might have provided responses they perceived as favorable rather than fully candid reflections of their experiences.
5. **Limited Longitudinal Perspective** The research was cross-sectional and did not capture changes in teacher collaboration over time. Longitudinal studies could better assess how collaboration practices evolve and their long-term impact on inclusive education.
6. **Focus on Teacher Perspectives Only** This study

centered on the views of general and special educators, without including input from other stakeholders such as students, parents, or school administrators, whose perspectives could enrich understanding of collaboration dynamics.

Future Prospects

- Expansion of Collaborative Training Programs
- Longitudinal Studies on Collaboration Impact
- Wider Geographic Coverage
- Involvement of Multiple Stakeholders
- Development of Structured Collaboration Frameworks
- Utilization of Technology for Collaboration
- Policy Advocacy and Support.

By addressing these prospects, future efforts can strengthen the collaborative capacities of teachers and improve educational outcomes for all students in inclusive settings across West Tripura.

Conclusion

Collaboration between general and special educators is vital for inclusive education in West Tripura. Despite positive attitudes and practices, institutional barriers persist. Addressing these challenges through policy and support can foster more effective inclusive classrooms. By integrating the study's findings into school culture, teacher training, and classroom practice, inclusion becomes more meaningful and sustainable. Collaborative teaching must be seen not just as a method, but as a mindset shift—from working in silos to working together for every child's success.

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