

A Study on the Status of SDG 4 in respect to Inclusive Education, Safe School Environment, Technical and Vocational Education

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ABSTRACT

The study investigated the implementation status of Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG4) in Indian schools, focusing on inclusive education, safe school environments, and technical and vocational education. This study employed a mixed-methods approach to compare implementation processes in government and private schools in Delhi. A sample of 60 teachers, comprising 30 government schools and 30 private schools, were selected through random sampling to participate in a self-constructed questionnaire. This study examined the current status, identified barriers to implementation, and explored teachers' perceptions and practices. The results revealed that private schools slightly outperform government schools in implementing inclusive education and providing vocational training, though both sectors have room for improvement. The study identified several barriers to effective implementation, including inadequate teacher training, high student-teacher ratios, poor infrastructure, and socio-economic constraints. The findings highlighted the need for enhanced teacher training, policy reforms, and increased resource allocation to bridge existing gaps and ensure the effective achievement of SDG 4 goals, fostering an inclusive, safe, and skill-oriented learning environment for all students.

Keywords: *Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4), Inclusive Education, Safe School Environment, Technical and Vocational Education, Government Schools, Private Schools.*

INTRODUCTION

"Education is the most powerful weapon you can use to change the world" (Mandela, 2003).

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Education is a cornerstone of sustainable development and societal progress. Recognizing this critical importance, the United Nations established Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4) as part of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals in 2015. "SDG 4 aims to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all by 2030 "(UN, 2015). This study focused on three key components of SDG 4: inclusive education, safe school environments, and technical and vocational education. Inclusive education is vital for creating an educational setting where all children, regardless of their backgrounds or abilities, can participate and succeed. A safe school environment is crucial for student's well-being and learning outcomes. Technical and vocational education plays a significant role in preparing students for the employment and promoting lifelong learning. In India, various initiatives have been undertaken to achieve the targets of SDG 4, including the implementation of the National Education Policy 2020, the Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan, and the expansion of digital learning platforms like DIKSHA. However, the effectiveness of these initiatives and the current status of SDG 4 implementation, particularly in terms of inclusive education, school safety, and vocational training, requires further investigation. This study aimed to examine the implementation status of SDG 4 in Indian schools, identify barriers to implementation, assess the availability of technical and vocational education, and explore teachers' perceptions and practices in promoting inclusive education. This study compares government and private schools in an effort to provide insights that can inform policy decisions and improve educational practices in line with SDG 4 objectives.

LITERATURE REVIEW:

Sharma (2024) studied the alignment between SDG 4 and NEP 2020, focusing on inclusive education, technology integration, and lifelong learning. Using thematic analysis, the study showed that NEP 2020 strongly supported the goals of SDG 4. Singh (2024) examined India's progress on SDG 4 through initiatives like RTE, DIKSHA, and SWAYAM. The study identified gaps in infrastructure, teacher training, and equity, stressing the need for reforms and lifelong learning. Sareen & Mandal (2024) explored blended learning in conflict-prone higher education areas using SDG 4 metrics. They found the current metrics insufficient to reflect socio-political challenges and noted high dropout rates among tribal males. Saini et al. (2023) analyzed SDG 4 indicators using a genetic algorithm. The study revealed strong interconnections between indicators and emphasized

the need for policy decisions based on these relationships. Kaur (2024) used participatory action research in Chandigarh schools. Interventions improved teacher attitudes, but barriers like lack of training and infrastructure remained. Mishra (2023) compared inclusive practices in public and private schools. Differences were found in attitudes, awareness, and infrastructure. The study suggested stronger policy implementation and training. Panda (2023) studied inclusive education in Odisha. Data from parents and teachers Garg (2023) studied 3,234 students in Punjab and Chandigarh. The findings revealed widespread violence, including from teachers and peers, and called for safety measures in schools. Singh (2019) found that many schools were not child-friendly or inclusive. Students felt their rights were often violated, indicating the need for better monitoring and supportive environments. Singh & Kaur (2024) studied vocational education in Punjab. Challenges included poor infrastructure, outdated curriculum, and teacher shortages. Goswami & Khanna (2023) investigated student awareness in tribal districts. They found low interest and awareness about vocational options, recommending awareness campaigns and curriculum updates. Mathur et al. (2022) analyzed the challenges in India's technical and vocational education system post-COVID-19, comparing it with Germany and China. They identified gaps in infrastructure, quality, and accessibility, suggesting adoption of international best practices. Studies concerning the achievement of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG 4) Zickafoose et al. (2024) highlighted challenges in SDG 4 implementation in sub-Saharan Africa, focusing on resource distribution and teacher preparation. Shutaleva et al. (2023) emphasized the need for improved teacher training to support students with special needs in Russia's inclusive education system. Durrani et al. (2023) found that remote learning worsened inequalities in Kazakhstan and called for strategies to bridge the digital divide. Nakidien et al. (2021) stressed the lack of teacher capacity in Africa, recommending a collaborative effort from various sectors to meet SDG 4. Kim et al. (2024) found that 73% of South Korean students with special needs were integrated into inclusive education settings, but improvements were needed in training and infrastructure. Woodcock et al. (2023) showed that Australian teachers who believed in inclusive education had higher self-efficacy, recommending professional development for all educators. Rad et al. (2022) emphasized the need for policy, training, and curriculum adaptation to support inclusive early childhood education globally. Kusimo & Chidozie (2019) identified challenges in Nigeria's inclusive education for physically disabled students, urging policy improvements. Moberg et al. (2019)

found that Japanese teachers were more critical of inclusive education compared to Finnish teachers, suggesting further research into global attitudes. Musiyam et al. (2024) found gaps in disaster resilience for vulnerable groups in Indonesian schools, calling for inclusive safety measures. Eluemuno et al. (2022) showed that a secure school environment positively impacts inclusive education by improving student engagement and retention in Nigeria. Adams & Baddianaah (2023) identified barriers to female enrollment in Ghana's TVET colleges, such as costs and lack of role models.

CONCLUSION

Studies in India revealed gaps in implementing SDG 4, with challenges in inclusive education, safe school environments, and vocational education. Global research emphasized the need for improved policies, teacher training, resources, and gender inclusion in education.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a mixed-methodology approach, combining quantitative and qualitative methods to provide a comprehensive understanding of the implementation status of SDG 4 in Indian schools.

1. **Sample and Sampling Procedure:** The target population comprised teachers from government and private schools in Delhi. A random sampling technique was used to select the sample. First, 5 zones and 3 districts were randomly selected from the 29 zones of Delhi. Then, 5 government schools and 7 private schools were chosen from these selected zones. Finally, a sample of 60 teachers (30 from government schools and 30 from private schools) was selected for the study.
2. Tool self-constructed questionnaire was developed, comprising both closed-ended (5-point Likert scale) and open-ended questions. The questionnaire covered aspects of inclusive education, safe school environment, and technical and vocational education. The tool went through a rigorous development process:

3. DATA ANALYSIS:

Data analysis involved both quantitative and qualitative methods. Descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation, and percentages) were used for quantitative data. Thematic analysis and coded analysis using QDA Miner were employed for qualitative data from open-ended questions.

4. ANALYSIS BASED on OBJECTIVE:

The analysis of the objectives has been given below-

Objective 1- To study the implementation status of inclusive education and safe school environment in Indian schools.

For analysis, the mean, standard deviation, and percentage have been calculated, and the results are mentioned below in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1 Implementation Status of Inclusive and Safe School Environment

School Type	Mean(\bar{x})	Standard Deviation	Percentage
Government School	52.93333333	7.807747405	85.37634409
Private School	56.5	5.7520611	91.12903226

The data presented in Table 4.1 indicates that both types of schools are attempting to implement inclusive education and safe spaces, but private schools show a relatively higher rate of effectiveness in doing so. Government schools are lagging behind because of insufficient resources, trained employees, and low student-teacher ratio.

Figure 1 Implementation Status of Inclusive and Safe School Environment

Objective 2- To identify the barriers in implementing inclusive education and maintaining a safe environment in schools.

To find the barriers in implementing inclusive education and maintaining a safe environment in schools, item number 26 (Checklist type question) has been incorporated. For analysis, frequency of responses have been counted and has been mentioned below with visual representation in the form of pie chart.

Table 4.2.1 Number of times major barriers were selected from the checklist (f)

S.NO	Barriers	Number of times the respondents selected the barrier from the checklist (f)
1.	Inadequate infrastructure	23
2.	Poor teacher-student ratio	30
3.	Lack of professional training	16
4.	Negative attitude toward inclusion	12

5.	Inadequate learning resources	24
6.	Lack of awareness among stakeholders	21

Figure 2 Number of times major barriers were selected from the checklist

Also to find the barriers, item number 27 (open-ended type) has been used in the tool for assessing the implementation status of SDG 4. For this purpose, Qualitative thematic analysis has been adopted, and relevant responses have been Coded with the help of the Grounded Theory Approach.

The analysis is presented below-

A. Thematic Analysis:

The answers gathered from the participants were coded and grouped into major themes according to the type of barriers. Below is an organized presentation of the findings, including quotes from the answers.

B. Coded Analysis in Percentage:

The answers gathered from the participants were coded in percentages.

Table 4.2.2 Barriers to Implementing Inclusive Education and Maintaining a Safe School Environment (Thematic Analysis and Coded Analysis in Percentage)

S.NO .	Barriers Category	Sub-Category	Direct Quotes from the Respondents
1.	Teacher-Related Barriers (46%)	Lack of Training and Professional Development (21%)	"We are not trained to handle children with special needs."
			"Teachers' training, abilities, and attitudes can be major limitations for inclusive education. The teachers are not trained adequately to teach children with special needs."
			"Every teacher must have a training program for inclusive education because sometimes teachers cannot handle the problems of disabled children."

		Overburdened Teachers (10%)	"Department orders daily new things to implement and lots of formal paperwork, so inclusive education is affected."
			"Overburdened teachers."
		Communication Issues (8%)	"Inability of the teacher to communicate in different methods and diversities of different types of students requires different methodologies."
		Resistance to Change (7%)	"A lack of adequately trained teachers to deliver the new curriculum, resistance to change from existing teaching practices."
2.	Student-Related Barriers (20%)	High Student-Teacher Ratio (12%)	"Poor teacher-student ratio." "We have around 60 students in our class, so we are unable to give the kind of attention a CWSN student deserves and requires." "Students are more in each class."
		Lack of Student Engagement and Awareness (5%)	"Students are not serious." "To teach and guide all the students to behave well and treat all the students

			equally and do not bully special children."
		Behavioral Issues and Bullying (3%)	"Some students discriminate against their peers, creating a negative attitude towards inclusion."
3	Infrastructure and Resource Barriers (38%)	Inadequate Infrastructure (20%)	"Infrastructure...land encroachment that made it difficult for schools to impart proper education as space also is a barrier." "Lack of ramps and lifts." "Unhygienic environment."

		Lack of Learning and Teaching Resources (10%)	"Inadequate learning resources." "Lack of resources."
		Insufficient Support Staff and Special Educators (8%)	"More special educators should be appointed." "Special educators must be more proficient and productive."
4	Administrative and Policy Barriers (18%)	Insufficient Funding (9%)	"Insufficient funding for special education programs, accessible infrastructure, assistive technologies, and learning materials."
		Lack of Administrative Support (6%)	"Lack of administrative support." "Support from school management is required."
		Frequent Policy Changes and Bureaucratic Hurdles (3%)	"Department order daily new things to implement and lots of formal paperwork, so inclusive education is affected."
5	Parental and Community Barriers (12%)	Lack of Parental Awareness and Engagement (6%)	"Encourage the parents." "Parental unawareness is a primary barrier."

Socioeconomic Barriers (4%)	"The primary barriers schools face include parental unawareness, low economic status, and outdated mindsets."
Limited Community Support (2%)	"Insufficient community support."

The data highlights that the main reasons hindering inclusive education are untrained and overburdened teachers, poor infrastructure, high student-teacher ratios, lack of support from administration and parents and limited resources making it difficult to create a safe and inclusive school environment.

Figure 3 Barriers in implementing Inclusive education and maintaining a safe environment in schools

Objective: 3- To study the status of availability and accessibility of technical and vocational education in Indian schools with respect to diverse learner needs. To find the status of availability and

accessibility of technical and vocational education, the mean, standard deviation, and percentage have been calculated, and the results have been mentioned below in Table 4.3.

Table 4.3 Status of Availability and Accessibility of Technical and Vocational Education

School Type	Mean(\bar{x})	Standard Deviation	Percentage
Government School	23.26666667	3.016430104	77.55555556
Private School	24.53333333	3.936857957	81.77777778

The data shown in **Table 4.3** spotlights that private school are better as compared to government schools. Private schools are financially strong and afford good modern infrastructure facilities for providing TVE, and also have partnerships with top-level industries which provide proper hands-on experience to students. Whereas, government schools lack proper infrastructure and most importantly, the administrative delays are the main reason. Nonetheless, the overall rankings demonstrate that technical and vocational training in both school types needs to improve further for more accessibility and inclusivity.

Figure 4 Status of Availability and Accessibility of Technical and Vocational Education

Objective 4- To explore teacher's perception and practices used in promoting inclusive education in both government and private schools.

To find the status of availability and accessibility of technical and vocational education, the mean, standard deviation, and percentage have been calculated, and the results are mentioned below in Table 4.4.

Table 4.4 Teacher's Perception and Practices

School Type	Mean(\bar{x})	Standard Deviation	Percentage
Government School	20.03333333	2.125109869	95.3968254
Private School	20.5	2.921383706	97.61904762

The data mentioned in Table 4.4 indicates that although both types of school teachers strongly favor inclusive education, private schools reflect slightly greater implementation and variability in practice. Because teachers in government schools adhere to a more uniform approach because of centralised restrictions and policy-oriented training, but teachers in private schools have a wider range of experiences and exposure to various inclusive methods.

Figure 5 Teacher's Perception and Practices**FINDINGS**

The key findings of the study are as follows:

1. **Status of Inclusive and Safe School Environment:** The findings showed that while both public and private schools had started the process of introducing inclusive education, private schools had adopted inclusive practices at a more rapid pace. These included the implementation of Individualised Education Plans (IEPs), the availability of special educators, and the use of differentiated teaching strategies. Government schools, on the other hand, were found to fall behind in these areas, especially because of limited infrastructure and irregular teacher training. Both types of schools showed a moderate level of implementation when it came to creating a safe learning environment. Despite the widespread availability of services like sanitary facilities and clean drinking water, emotional and psychological safety protocols, such as anti-bullying policies and counselling services, were not consistently implemented, particularly in government schools.
2. **Barriers in implementing Inclusive and safe environment:** In private and government schools, insufficient teacher training, high workload, resistance to inclusive practices, high student-teacher ratio, problems of behaviour, and scarce resources inhibit inclusive education and a safe learning environment. Policy uncertainty, lack of appropriate funding, low parental awareness, and socioeconomic limitations contribute further to the problem, making targeted interventions essential in order to meet SDG 4. This is consistent with (Kaur, 2024), who reported inflexible curriculums, poor parental guidance, and inadequate infrastructure as the key inhibitions. However, the present study also indicates bullying and discipline issues, which were not highly reported in previous studies except in (Garg, 2023), where widespread school violence was reported in Punjab and Chandigarh.
3. **Availability of Technical and Vocational Education:** Both private and government schools offer technical and vocational education accessibility. Private schools slightly outperform but the difference is not very significant. The government schools too are putting efforts into increasing availability and accessibility. Both school types collectively depict a positive direction towards achieving the SDG 4 goals. The findings showcased that TVE are consistent with earlier

studies by (Singh & Kaur, 2024) and (Mathur et al. 2022), validating infrastructure and accessibility deficits in private and government schools.

4. Teacher's Perception and Practices in Inclusive Education: Inclusive education is viewed positively by both types of schools. Both public schools and private schools are actively practicing inclusivity-promoting practices. Inclusive educational strategies are slightly better implemented in private schools compared to government schools which is consistent with (Mishra, 2023) results.

CONCLUSION: The study examined the application of Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4) in Indian schools, with an emphasis on inclusive education, school safety, and vocational training. It contrasts government and private schools to examine current practices, challenges, and teachers' attitudes towards inclusivity and students' well-being. A mixed-methodology was employed, and data were accumulated from a randomly drawn sample of 60 teachers of public and private schools (30 from each type of school). A self-devised questionnaire with both open- ended and closed-ended questions was used for the study. The analysis comprised descriptive statistics, thematic analysis, and coded assessment through QDA Miner.

The results showed that private schools perform slightly better than government schools in providing inclusive education and vocational training. There is a scope for improvement for both sectors, however. Both groups of teachers predominantly favor inclusive education, but government school teachers have more similar opinions, while private school teachers have higher variability of views and practices. The study identified various barriers, including inadequate teacher training, high student- teacher ratios, poor infrastructure, bureaucratic issues, and socio-economic constraints.

Overall, the study emphasizes and draws attention towards the necessity of solutions include enhanced teacher training, policy reforms, and increased resource allocation to bridge the existing gaps. Strengthening the support systems in both types of schools will be crucial for ensuring that the goals of SDG 4 are met effectively, fostering an inclusive, safe, and skill- oriented learning environment for all students.

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