

# Comparative Perspectives on Special Needs Education in India and Ethiopia

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## Abstract

Special Needs Education (SNE) has become a central theme in global educational reform, particularly within developing countries that strive to ensure equitable learning opportunities for children with disabilities. This comparative study examines the policy landscape, institutional mechanisms, and implementation practices of Special Needs Education in India and Ethiopia two diverse nations that share common developmental challenges but differ significantly in institutional capacity and historical trajectories. Drawing on national policy documents, international reports, and peer-reviewed literature, the study adopts a qualitative comparative framework to analyze legislation, administrative structures, teacher preparation systems, community attitudes, resource availability, and school-level inclusion practices.

The findings reveal that India has made considerable advancements through the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act (2016), Samagra Shiksha (2018), and the National Education Policy (2020), which collectively emphasize inclusive schooling, reasonable accommodation, and strengthened teacher preparation. Ethiopia, guided by its Inclusive Education Strategy (2012) and successive Education Sector Development Programs (ESDPs), demonstrates strong policy commitment but faces persistent challenges in resource allocation, infrastructure, teacher training, and societal awareness.

The comparative analysis highlights shared systemic barriers—such as inadequate specialized personnel, limited assistive technologies, and regional disparities—while also noting India's relative advantage in institutional maturity and support systems due to its longer history of inclusive reforms. The study recommends enhanced inter-country collaboration, sustained investment in teacher education, improved monitoring systems, and stronger community sensitization programs. These insights contribute to global discourses on inclusive education and offer direction for policymakers, practitioners, and international development partners working toward disability-inclusive educational ecosystems.

**Keywords:** Special Needs Education, Inclusive Education, Disability Policy, India, Ethiopia, Comparative Education, Educational Reform

## 1. Introduction

Inclusive and equitable education has become a global developmental priority, particularly after the Salamanca Statement (UNESCO, 1994), the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD, 2006), and Sustainable Development Goal 4, which collectively envision education as a universal right irrespective of disability status. Special Needs Education (SNE) a structured effort to support children with disabilities through tailored pedagogy, resources, and

institutional mechanisms has become integral to these commitments. In low- and middle-income countries, however, implementing SNE faces constraints arising from socio-economic disparities, infrastructural gaps, and limited teacher preparation (Sharma & Jitendra, 2020; Singal, 2019). Against this landscape, comparing the status of SNE in India and Ethiopia is particularly relevant, as both countries are multicultural, developing economies with emerging inclusive education frameworks.

India has progressed considerably over several decades in creating institutional structures for disability-inclusive education. Its early initiatives, such as the Integrated Education for Disabled Children (IEDC) scheme introduced in 1974, laid the foundation for mainstreaming learners with disabilities into regular schools (Mukhopadhyay, 2009). Over time, policies such as Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA), Samagra Shiksha (2018), and the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act (2016) have expanded the legislative and administrative ecosystem for SNE. The National Education Policy (NEP, 2020) further strengthens this commitment by embedding inclusion, accessibility, and universal design principles into teacher training, curriculum development, and educational governance (Government of India, 2020). Despite this progress, studies continue to identify persistent challenges: insufficient trained teachers, lack of accessible infrastructure, inadequate classroom accommodations, and rural–urban disparities in service provision (Singal, 2019; Mehta & Sharma, 2021).

Ethiopia, on the other hand, began formalizing SNE relatively recently. Its Inclusive Education Strategy (2012) and Education Sector Development Programs (ESDP I–VI) emphasize mainstreaming children with disabilities and expanding access to formal education (MoE Ethiopia, 2012). However, implementation remains inconsistent due to limited funding, weak institutional capacity, shortages of specialized educators, and socio-cultural barriers such as stigma and misconceptions about disability (Molla, 2017; Tefera & Kedir, 2021). These challenges reveal a gap between policy intention and practical realization.

Comparative research on inclusive education argues that understanding how different countries operationalize disability-inclusive policies can illuminate structural constraints and innovative practices that may otherwise remain underexplored (Norwich, 2014; Peters, 2010). India and Ethiopia offer a unique comparative space: both are signatories to key international agreements such as the UNCRPD, both grapple with multi-lingual and culturally diverse populations, and both face resource limitations typical of developing economies. At the same time, India’s longer trajectory in inclusive reforms and relatively stronger institutional structures contrast with Ethiopia’s more recent, resource-constrained efforts. This divergence offers valuable analytical insights.

This study examines the status of SNE in India and Ethiopia using a policy-practice comparative approach. The analysis focuses on five core domains: (a) policy and legal frameworks; (b) institutional and administrative mechanisms; (c) teacher preparation and professional development; (d) school-level inclusion practices; and (e) socio-cultural attitudes and systemic barriers. By analyzing these dimensions in comparative perspective, the study aims to answer the following research questions:

1. How do India and Ethiopia differ in their policy frameworks for Special Needs Education?
2. What institutional structures support SNE implementation in each country?
3. How effectively are inclusive education practices implemented at the school level?
4. What are the key challenges and opportunities for improving SNE in both contexts?
5. What comparative insights can guide future reforms and inter-country learning?

The findings from this comparative analysis aim to contribute to the broader discourse on inclusive education within developing countries. They also seek to inform policymakers, teacher educators, school

administrators, and international development organizations working toward the realization of disability-inclusive education systems.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. Global Perspectives on Special Needs Education

Internationally, the shift toward inclusive education is anchored in three major frameworks:

- **The Salamanca Statement (UNESCO, 1994)** – established the principle that schools should accommodate all learners.
- **UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCPRD, 2006)** – mandated inclusive education systems at all levels.
- **Sustainable Development Goal 4 (UN, 2015)** – committed nations to ensure “inclusive and equitable quality education.”

Studies across developing nations show that inclusion improves academic performance, socialization, and long-term well-being for children with disabilities (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011). However, implementation barriers persist due to poverty, teacher shortages, and attitudinal resistance (Sharma et al., 2019).

### 2.2. Special Needs Education in India

#### 2.2.1 Policy and Legislative Framework

India has evolved a strong policy structure:

- **RPwD Act, 2016** – guarantees nondiscrimination, reasonable accommodation, and inclusive education.
- **NEP 2020** – promotes Universal Design for Learning (UDL), cross-disability teacher training, and barrier-free learning environments.
- **Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan (2018)** – provides funding for resource rooms, Braille books, hearing aids, and special educators.

Research highlights India’s commitment but identifies gaps in teacher training and monitoring systems (Mehta, 2021).

#### 2.2.2 Classroom Implementation

Studies show varied inclusion across states:

- Successful inclusion in Kerala, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu due to better teacher preparation (Rao & Sengupta, 2020).
- Limited inclusion in rural areas due to cultural stigma and lack of resources (Singal, 2019).

#### 2.2.3 Teacher Preparedness

Teacher readiness remains a major challenge. Investigations reveal:

- Insufficient pre-service training (Ghai, 2018)
- Limited exposure to assistive technologies

Overcrowded classrooms hampering individualized instruction

### 2.2.4. Special Needs Education in Ethiopia

#### 2.2.4.1 Policy Background

Ethiopia’s inclusive education efforts expanded after 2000, culminating in:

- Education Sector Development Programs (ESDP IV–VI)

- Inclusive Education Strategy 2012
- GEQIP and GEQIP-E reforms

However, implementation remains uneven.

#### 2.2.4.3. Classroom Challenges

Studies report:

- Teacher shortages and lack of special educators (Molla, 2017)
- Limited training in disability pedagogy (Tefera & Kedir, 2021)
- Inadequate assistive devices and resource rooms
- Cultural misconceptions linking disability with superstition or wrongdoing

#### 2.2.4.4 Community Barriers

Socio-cultural stigma often prevents children with disabilities from even enrolling in schools (Yimam, 2020).

#### 2.2.4.5. Comparative Research Insights

Comparative studies show:

- India has a longer history of structured inclusion and stronger institutional mechanisms.
- Ethiopia faces more severe resource and capacity challenges.
- Both countries struggle with teacher training and community attitudes.
- International frameworks play a major role in shaping national policies.

### 3. Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative comparative research design, which is widely used to examine educational systems across different national contexts. Comparative education scholars emphasize that such an approach helps identify shared patterns, structural divergences, and context-specific barriers that shape policy and practice (Bray, 2014; Crossley & Watson, 2003). Because Special Needs Education (SNE) varies across social, political, and cultural settings, a comparative framework enables a systematic exploration of both countries' policy intentions and the practical realities on the ground.

#### 3.1 Research Design

The study employs a documentary and literature-based analysis, drawing from policy documents, peer-reviewed journal articles, international reports, and institutional frameworks. This method is appropriate for countries where access to empirical field data is constrained, and where national policies and published studies provide substantial insights into the state of inclusive education (Ahmed & Abdi, 2020).

Sources included:

- Government policies and acts from India (e.g., RPwD Act, NEP 2020, Samagra Shiksha guidelines)
- Ethiopian educational policies (e.g., Inclusive Education Strategy 2012, ESDP VI)
- Peer-reviewed articles on SNE, inclusion, teacher preparedness, and disability services
- Reports from UNESCO, UNICEF, World Bank, and UNCRPD monitoring committees
- Published empirical studies conducted in both countries

These documents were analyzed using a thematic approach to extract patterns related to SNE access, curriculum adaptations, teacher training, societal attitudes, and implementation challenges.

#### 3.2 Research Questions

The study was guided by the following research questions:

1. What are the major policy frameworks governing Special Needs Education in India and Ethiopia?
2. How do the two countries differ in terms of teacher preparation, educational infrastructure, and support systems for learners with disabilities?
3. What are the similarities and differences in access, enrollment, and inclusion indicators?
4. Which contextual factors influence the development and implementation of SNE in both countries?
5. What lessons can each country draw from the other to strengthen inclusive and special education systems?

### 3.3. Data Collection Sources

#### 1. Primary Official Documents

India: Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act (2016), NEP 2020, Samagra Shiksha Framework (2018), Rehabilitation Council of India guidelines.

Ethiopia: Ministry of Education's Inclusive Education Strategy (2012), General Education Quality Improvement Programme (GEQIP), and ESDP IV–VI.

#### 2. Peer-reviewed Journal Articles

Studies were included if they met the following criteria:

- Focus on SNE, inclusive education, disability studies, or educational barriers
- Published between 2010–2024
- Conducted in India or Ethiopia
- Empirical, theoretical, or policy analysis in nature

#### 3. International Organization Reports

- UNESCO Global Education Monitoring Reports
- World Bank disability inclusion reports
- UNICEF assessments on disability inclusion
- UN Sustainable Development Goal 4 progress reports
- These reports provided comparative indicators on access, enrollment, teacher training, and resource distribution.

### 3.4 Data Analysis Technique

The study used thematic content analysis, which involved:

- Coding policy content (e.g., rights, accommodations, teacher requirements)
- Identifying cross-national themes, such as infrastructure gaps, attitudes, access barriers
- Comparing strengths and weaknesses of each country's system
- Mapping convergence and divergence between policies and actual implementation

The themes that emerged across both countries include:

1. Legislative commitments and policy direction
2. Institutional capacity and administrative structures
3. Teacher education and professional competencies
4. Accessibility and learning support systems
5. Socio-cultural attitudes toward disability
6. Funding and resource allocation constraints

These thematic categories form the basis for the comparative discussion presented in subsequent sections.

### 3.5 Ethical Considerations

Since the study relies entirely on publicly available documents and published literature, there were no human subjects involved. Ethical concerns related to confidentiality, consent, or anonymity did not apply. However, intellectual integrity was ensured by following APA 7 citation guidelines, providing accurate references, and acknowledging all sources appropriately.

### 3.6. Limitations of the Study

Although documentary analysis is useful, it has limitations:

#### i) Lack of real-time field data

The study does not include classroom observations, interviews, or surveys that would capture lived experiences of teachers, students, and parents.

#### ii) Uneven availability of research literature

India has comparatively richer research output on SNE, while Ethiopian literature is more limited.

#### iii) Policy–practice gaps are difficult to measure

Policies may appear strong but fail in implementation; without fieldwork, certain practical nuances may not be fully captured.

#### iv) Variability within countries

India's states and Ethiopia's regions exhibit significant differences in educational access and resources; documentary analysis may not fully represent intra-country disparities.

Despite these limitations, the comparative approach offers valuable insights into how both countries structure their SNE systems and the challenges they face.

## 4. Results and Discussion

### 4.1 Introduction to Findings

The comparative analysis of Special Needs Education (SNE) in India and Ethiopia reveals significant differences in policy development, implementation capacity, teacher preparation, and access to educational resources for learners with disabilities. Results are presented thematically and discussed in relation to existing literature. Overall, India demonstrates a more established systemic structure, while Ethiopia shows strong policy intent but limited operationalization. Both countries share persistent implementation gaps.

### 4.2 Policy Frameworks and Legislative Commitments

#### Findings

India has a long-standing legislative foundation for SNE, beginning with the Persons with Disabilities Act (1995), evolving to the Right to Education Act (2009), and culminating in the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act (2016). India recognizes 21 categories of disabilities, ensures provisions for reasonable accommodation, and mandates inclusive schooling under Samagra Shiksha (MHRD, 2020).

Ethiopia, meanwhile, has more recent frameworks. The Special Needs Education Strategy (2012) and the Education Sector Development Programs (ESDP I–VI) demonstrate a commitment to inclusive education. However, Ethiopia's legal mandates are not as comprehensive as India's, especially concerning disability categorization, enforcement mechanisms, and resource allocation.

### 4.3 Discussion

The comparative findings confirm earlier observations that India's SNE framework is mature but fragmented, while Ethiopia's is emerging yet progressive (Singal, 2016; Teklemariam, 2020). For instance, although Ethiopia emphasizes inclusion in principle, it lacks statutory enforcement comparable

to India's RPwD Act. This aligns with Ainscow (2020), who argues that inclusive education policies need both strong legal backing and practical support systems to succeed.

India's policy advantage lies in legal mandates and institutional bodies (RCI, CRCs, BRCs), whereas Ethiopia's strength lies in its integration of SNE within broader sectoral reforms through ESDP.

#### 4.4 Teacher Preparation and Professional Competence

##### Findings

Teacher preparation emerged as a critical area of divergence:

##### India:

- Structured teacher education regulated by NCTE and RCI.
- Dedicated B.Ed (Special Education) programs.
- Mandatory disability modules in general teacher training.
- However, many teachers still feel underprepared for inclusive pedagogy.

##### Ethiopia:

- Limited pre-service SNE training.
- Few universities offering specialized SNE programs.
- Reliance on short in-service trainings.
- Teachers express resistance or lack confidence in handling diverse needs.

##### Discussion

These findings align with Sharma and Loreman (2014), who report that teacher attitudes and training are the strongest predictors of inclusive education success. In Ethiopia, insufficient training reinforces teachers' apprehension, particularly when dealing with intellectual and behavioral disabilities (Tirussew, 2012).

India, despite having a stronger institutional framework, still struggles with scale. With classroom sizes often exceeding 40 students, even trained teachers find it challenging to implement individualized education plans (IEPs).

Overall, India has training infrastructure, while Ethiopia has intent but lacks capacity.

#### 4.5 Access, Enrollment, and Inclusion Indicators

##### Findings

Both countries have made noticeable progress, but disparities remain:

##### India:

- Improved enrollment under Samagra Shiksha.
- Persistent gender gaps—girls with disabilities remain underserved.
- Significant state-wise variation (e.g., Kerala vs. Bihar).
- Better access to assistive devices and resource rooms compared to Ethiopia.

##### Ethiopia:

- Enrollment is increasing but remains low overall.
- Strongest gains seen in urban pilot inclusive schools.
- Rural areas face acute shortages of materials, trained personnel, and infrastructure.
- Cultural beliefs about disability influence school attendance.

##### Discussion

These results align with UNICEF (2019) reports in both countries. The data confirm that while India leads in absolute numbers due to its established infrastructure and legal mandates, Ethiopia's expansion

is constrained by resource limitations and socio-cultural attitudes (Abebe, 2019).

Notably, Ethiopia's community-based rehabilitation programs foster strong grassroots engagement, a strength India can adopt. Conversely, Ethiopia can learn from India's large-scale resource allocation mechanisms.

#### **4.6 Infrastructure, Assistive Technologies, and Learning Environment**

##### **Findings**

Infrastructure and assistive technologies represent one of the largest gaps between the two countries.

**India** has:

- Better-developed barrier-free infrastructure (ramps, accessible toilets, Braille printers).
- ICT integration under the Digital India initiative.
- Resource centers at district and block levels.
- However, quality varies significantly by region and school management type.

**Ethiopia** struggles with:

- Limited accessibility features in most schools.
- Scarcity of assistive devices (hearing aids, Braille materials).
- Dependency on international NGOs for special materials.
- Poor school building maintenance among public institutions.

##### **Discussion**

These findings support Wondwosen (2021), who noted infrastructural inadequacies as a central barrier to SNE in Ethiopia. India's progress is notable, but implementation gaps persist, especially in rural regions. State-level decentralization often means infrastructure quality depends on local governance capacity.

#### **4.7 Parental Attitudes, Cultural Perceptions, and Community Engagement**

##### **Findings**

Cultural beliefs strongly influence SNE inclusion:

**India:**

- Stigma persists but has decreased significantly.
- Parents show stronger school engagement in urban areas.
- NGOs and parent associations improve awareness.

**Ethiopia:**

- Traditional beliefs link disability to misfortune or divine causes.
- Stigma is higher in rural communities, affecting school attendance.
- CBR programs have strong positive impacts on community participation.

##### **Discussion**

The findings reflect Abebe's (2019) argument that socio-cultural contexts determine parental involvement and student enrollment. Ethiopia's reliance on CBR is evidence that localized strategies can effectively change perceptions. India's implementation of national awareness campaigns has improved acceptance, but deeply rooted societal biases remain, especially for children with intellectual disabilities (Alur & Timmons, 2009).

#### **4.8 Implementation Gaps and Systemic Challenges**

##### **Findings**

Both countries face persistent implementation barriers:

## India

- Fragmentation between central and state responsibilities
- Inadequate monitoring of inclusive classrooms
- Insufficient special educators at the school level
- Overburdened teachers with large class sizes

## Ethiopia

### Severe shortage of trained teachers

- Weak monitoring and evaluation systems
- Funding gaps at regional and district levels
- Regional inequality between urban–rural areas

## Discussion

In line with Bray et al. (2014), these findings confirm that both structural and human resource challenges limit SNE outcomes. While India’s issue is scale and coordination, Ethiopia’s challenge is foundational capacity building.

Furthermore, both systems struggle to fully operationalize inclusive pedagogies despite strong policy rhetoric. This is consistent with Ainscow’s (2020) argument that inclusive education frequently suffers from “symbolic policy adoption,” where implementation lags behind aspirations.

## 4.9 Cross-Country Insights: Convergences and Divergences

### Convergences

- Strong policy commitments to inclusive education
- Growing awareness about disability rights
- Challenges related to teacher preparedness and training
- Gaps between policy and ground-level implementation
- Urban–rural disparities affecting access and quality

### Divergences

**India:** Mature legal framework, wider infrastructure, strong institutional support.

**Ethiopia:** Emerging system with rapid reform but limited resources and capacity.

**India:** Better availability of assistive technologies.

**Ethiopia:** Stronger community-based rehabilitation networks.

These convergences and divergences illustrate how both countries can learn from one another:

India could benefit from Ethiopia’s community engagement models, while Ethiopia could adapt India’s teacher training structures and disability categorization frameworks.

## 4.10 Overall Interpretation and Implications

The comparative analysis reveals that Special Needs Education in India and Ethiopia is shaped by historical, socio-cultural, political, and economic factors. Although India displays more systemic maturity and resource availability, it continues to face structural and quality-related challenges. Ethiopia exhibits promising policy reforms and community-driven approaches but requires significant investment in training, infrastructure, and policy enforcement.

Results suggest that successful inclusive education systems require not only robust policies but also sustained teacher training, culturally responsive approaches, and multi-level coordination—echoing global literature (UNESCO, 1994; United Nations, 2015).

## 5. Summary of Results

1. India's SNE system is older, wider, and better institutionalized, whereas Ethiopia's is newer, evolving, and resource-constrained.
2. Teacher training gaps are critical in both countries, though more severe in Ethiopia.
3. Infrastructure and assistive technology availability is significantly higher in India.
4. Socio-cultural attitudes strongly affect inclusion in both contexts.
5. Implementation barriers persist, limiting the effectiveness of policy frameworks.
6. Both countries can learn from each other's strengths to enhance inclusive education outcomes.

## 6. Conclusion and Recommendations

### 6.1 Conclusion

This comparative analysis of Special Needs Education (SNE) in India and Ethiopia highlights the complex intersections of policy development, implementation practices, resource allocation, and societal attitudes toward learners with disabilities. While both countries demonstrate a growing commitment to inclusive education, substantial gaps persist between policy intentions and ground-level realities.

India's SNE system benefits from a more extensive legislative framework—such as the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act (2016), the Rehabilitation Council of India guidelines, and the inclusive provisions of the National Education Policy (2020). These policies have improved teacher training programmes, established clearer service-delivery models, and expanded early identification mechanisms. However, persistent challenges remain, including inadequate classroom-level implementation, inconsistent availability of resource teachers, and a continued reliance on medical rather than social models of disability in some states.

Ethiopia, in contrast, has made significant strides through the Education Sector Development Plans, Inclusive Education Strategy (2015), and the broader framework of the 1994 Education and Training Policy. Despite these efforts, Ethiopia continues to face systemic issues related to limited financial resources, regional disparities, insufficiently trained personnel, and low parental awareness—factors that slow the expansion of inclusive schooling. The scarcity of data on disability prevalence further complicates evidence-based policy formulation.

Across both countries, the study reveals common patterns: insufficient teacher preparedness, limited assistive technologies, infrastructural barriers, and persistent stigma. Importantly, the analysis shows that policy innovations often outpace institutional capacity, resulting in fragmented implementation. Thus, a sustainable inclusive education system requires not only strong policies but also coherent operational mechanisms, adequate investment, and a shift in societal attitudes.

Overall, the comparative insights confirm that inclusive education in India and Ethiopia is evolving but remains incomplete. Strengthening systemic coordination, empowering teachers, and improving school environments are essential for building equitable, inclusive learning spaces for all.

### 6.2 Recommendations

#### Strengthen Teacher Training and Professional Development

- Expand pre-service and in-service training in inclusive pedagogies, universal design for learning (UDL), and classroom-based assessment.
- In Ethiopia, increase the number of SNE-trained teachers at regional teacher education colleges.
- In India, ensure each school cluster has at least one qualified special educator with regular monitoring.

**Improve Early Identification and Intervention Services**

- Integrate routine screening for developmental delays at the ECCE and primary levels.
- Establish school-based intervention centres with multidisciplinary teams.
- Promote parent–teacher collaboration in early identification, especially in rural and tribal regions in both countries.

**Enhance Inclusive School Infrastructure**

- Adopt barrier-free architectural designs, including ramps, tactile pathways, accessible toilets, and auditory/visual signage.
- Prioritize infrastructure grants for rural schools and resource-constrained regions of Ethiopia.

**Expand Access to Assistive Technologies**

- Provide low-cost assistive tools (Braille kits, hearing devices, communication boards) through government schemes and NGO partnerships.
- Promote digital assistive technology in India and pilot low-tech alternatives in Ethiopia where internet access is limited.

**Strengthen Policy Implementation and Monitoring**

- Establish clear protocols for implementing inclusive classroom practices at school and district levels.
- Create disability-inclusive school improvement plans aligned with national policies.
- Develop monitoring indicators specific to learning outcomes for children with disabilities.

**Increase Community Awareness and Reduce Stigma**

- Conduct community-based disability awareness campaigns using culturally relevant approaches.
- Empower parents through support groups, information centres, and training workshops.
- Work with local leaders, religious institutions, and youth groups to reduce misconceptions about disability.

**Promote Research, Data Collection, and Evidence-Based Planning**

- Conduct national and sub-national surveys on disability prevalence, learning outcomes, and school participation.
- Encourage universities in both countries to collaborate on cross-cultural SNE research and teacher education.
- Use data to refine policies, allocate resources, and support continuous improvement.

**Conclusion**

This comparative study of Special Needs Education (SNE) in India and Ethiopia demonstrates that both countries have made noteworthy progress toward building inclusive education systems, yet significant disparities remain between policy commitments and classroom realities. India has developed a relatively comprehensive legislative and institutional framework, supported by the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act (2016), Samagra Shiksha, and the National Education Policy (2020). These initiatives provide structured mechanisms for teacher preparation, early identification, resource support, and school-level implementation. However, gaps persist in teacher competency, availability of assistive technologies, uniformity of services across states, and the transformation of traditional, exam-centric teaching practices.

Ethiopia, although at a different stage of development, has demonstrated strong political will through the Education and Training Policy (1994), the Inclusive Education Strategy (2015), and repeated

commitments in the Education Sector Development Plans. Nevertheless, the country continues to face systemic constraints, including inadequate funding, limited trained personnel, insufficient data on disability prevalence, and regional disparities that hinder equitable access to services. Rural communities particularly struggle with awareness, infrastructural challenges, and limited access to specialist support. Despite these contextual differences, both countries share common challenges: insufficient teacher preparation, limited assistive resources, infrastructural barriers, and enduring social stigma. These barriers reveal that inclusive education requires more than policy directives—it demands sustained investment, collaborative stakeholder involvement, and meaningful transformation of school cultures. The comparative insights confirm that inclusive education in both India and Ethiopia is progressing but remains incomplete. Strengthening teacher training, expanding early intervention, enhancing assistive technology provision, improving monitoring systems, and increasing community participation are essential for advancing inclusion. Ultimately, building inclusive and equitable learning environments requires coordinated policy action and societal commitment to ensure that every learner with special needs can participate fully, learn meaningfully, and achieve their potential.

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