

Social Inclusion Practices in Private vs. Government Schools

Prashant Vitthalrao Nandanvare

Assistant Professor

Department of English

KES Arts, Commerce and Science College Kalwan, Tal: Kalwan

Savitribai Phule Pune University, Pune.

ORCID ID 0009-0004-3948-6711

Abstract— Social inclusion in schools encompasses policies, pedagogies, and everyday interactions that ensure all learners—irrespective of caste, class, gender, disability, language, or religion—feel valued, participate fully, and achieve equitably. This manuscript compares the inclusion practices of private and government schools in India through a mixed-methods survey of 420 stakeholders (teachers, students, and administrators) across four states. The study investigates structural supports (policies, infrastructure, resource allocation), pedagogical adaptations (differentiated instruction, Universal Design for Learning), and sociocultural climates (peer acceptance, teacher attitudes). Findings indicate that while private schools often possess better physical infrastructure and targeted remedial programs, government schools tend to operationalize broader policy mandates like the Right to Education (RTE) Act and inclusive admissions more systematically, albeit with uneven implementation due to resource shortages.

Quantitatively, government schools showed higher compliance with inclusive admission and fee-waiver policies, whereas private schools scored higher on teacher-initiated differentiated pedagogy and parental engagement. Qualitative narratives reveal that inclusion succeeds where leadership is committed and teachers receive sustained support, irrespective of management type. The paper concludes that a hybrid model—combining the policy rigor of government systems with the innovation and resource agility of private institutions—could accelerate inclusive outcomes. Recommendations include sustained teacher professional development, participatory school improvement plans, student voice mechanisms, and collaborative networks that diffuse inclusive innovations across school types.

KEYWORDS

social inclusion; inclusive education; private schools; government schools; equity; Universal Design for Learning; RTE Act; differentiated pedagogy; India

INTRODUCTION

Education's transformative promise rests on its ability to include rather than exclude. In India, the Right to Education (RTE) Act, 2009, and the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 explicitly foreground inclusion, yet disparities in implementation persist across school types. Private schools—ranging from elite urban institutions to budget schools in peri-urban areas—coexist with a vast network of government schools that bear the constitutional obligation to provide free

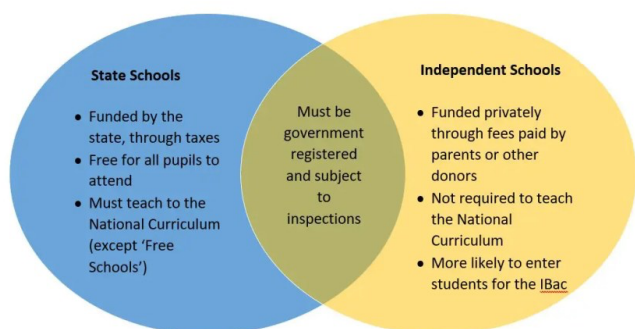


Fig.1 Private vs. Government Schools, [Source\(\[1\]\)](#)

and compulsory education. These dual systems create a compelling context to interrogate how inclusion is practiced, who benefits, and where gaps remain.

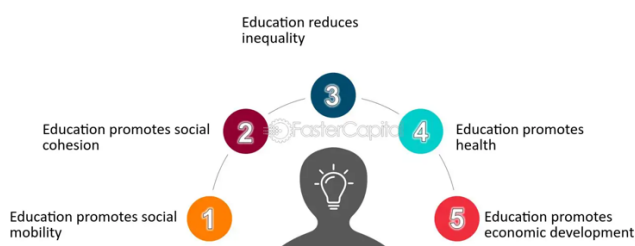


Fig.2 Social Inclusion Practices,[Source\(\[2\]\)](#)

Social inclusion in schools refers to more than mere access; it includes meaningful participation, supportive environments, respect for diversity, and equitable outcomes. It spans physical accessibility, curricular flexibility, psychosocial support, and community engagement. Comparing private and government schools offers insight into how different governance structures, accountability regimes, and resource profiles shape inclusive practices. This study asks: (1) How do private and government schools conceptualize and operationalize social inclusion? (2) What are the similarities and differences in specific practices, supports, and challenges? (3) What strategies can bridge the strengths of both systems?

The manuscript situates these questions within Indian and international literature on inclusive education, equity, and school effectiveness. By employing a mixed-methods survey complemented by open-ended interviews, the research generates a nuanced portrait of inclusion that goes beyond stereotypes of resource-rich private schools and underfunded government schools. The results point toward context-sensitive interventions that harness local agency, policy levers, and cross-sector collaboration.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Conceptualizing Social Inclusion

Social inclusion is often framed as a rights-based approach that ensures marginalized learners experience belonging and success. Booth and Ainscow's Index for Inclusion emphasizes three dimensions: creating inclusive cultures, producing inclusive policies, and evolving inclusive practices. Internationally, UNESCO and UNICEF documents underscore inclusive education as central to Sustainable Development Goal 4. In India, inclusion intersects with historical inequities of caste, gender, disability, and language diversity.

Inclusive Education in the Indian Policy Landscape

The RTE Act mandates 25% reservation for economically weaker sections in private schools and free education in government schools. The Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) and now Samagra Shiksha integrate components for children with special needs (CWSN). NEP 2020 calls for barrier-free access, flexible curricula, and teacher preparation for inclusion. However, implementation fidelity varies: government schools may meet policy mandates but struggle with chronic shortages of specialized staff, while private schools may selectively adopt inclusive rhetoric without systemic change.

Private vs. Government Schools: A Comparative Lens

Research often portrays private schools as better performing on standardized tests, but studies attribute this to socioeconomic selection rather than inherent school quality. In terms of inclusion, private schools exhibit heterogeneity: elite schools may have robust counseling services and individualized learning plans, whereas low-fee private schools may lack even basic infrastructure. Government schools, conversely, have the advantage of scale, public funding, and legal accountability but face bureaucratic inertia and teacher workload issues.

Dimensions of Inclusion

1. **Policy and Governance:** Admission policies, fee waivers, documentation requirements, and

grievance redressal mechanisms are critical. Government schools must comply with RTE norms; private schools often self-regulate within broad guidelines.

2. **Infrastructure and Accessibility:** Ramps, accessible toilets, assistive devices, and inclusive classrooms are tangible markers. Government-funded schemes provide grants, but implementation is uneven. Private schools often invest more in physical facilities when market demand or brand positioning aligns with inclusion.
3. **Pedagogy and Assessment:** Differentiated instruction, formative assessment, multi-level teaching, and Universal Design for Learning (UDL) are central. Teacher autonomy and training, as well as class size, mediate pedagogical inclusivity.
4. **School Culture and Relationships:** Peer acceptance, absence of bullying, student voice councils, and teacher empathy shape daily experiences. Leadership commitment and continuous professional development enhance inclusive culture.
5. **Family and Community Engagement:** Parent-teacher associations (PTAs), home visits, local partnerships, and community resource mobilization support inclusion. Government schools often partner with local bodies; private schools may leverage alumni networks and corporate sponsorships.

Gaps in Existing Research

While many studies examine inclusion among children with disabilities or economically weaker sections, few compare management types across diverse inclusion dimensions simultaneously. There is also limited exploration of how teacher beliefs and student voice interact with structural variables. This study aims to fill these gaps by adopting a

holistic framework and mixed-method design to juxtapose private and government practices.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

A convergent parallel mixed-methods design was adopted. Quantitative and qualitative data were collected simultaneously, analyzed separately, and then merged to draw integrated conclusions. This approach facilitated triangulation and enhanced validity.

Sample and Setting

Four Indian states—two from the north (e.g., Punjab, Uttar Pradesh) and two from the south (e.g., Tamil Nadu, Karnataka)—were selected to capture regional diversity. Within each state, two districts were chosen: one predominantly urban and one predominantly rural. From these districts, 14 private and 14 government secondary schools were randomly selected, yielding 28 schools. Participants included:

- **Teachers:** 196 (94 government, 102 private)
- **Students (Grades 6–10):** 196 (98 government, 98 private)
- **Administrators / Principals:** 28 (one from each school)

Total respondents: 420.

Instruments

1. **Structured Questionnaire:** A 42-item Likert-scale instrument measured five inclusion dimensions: policy compliance (PC), infrastructure accessibility (IA), pedagogical adaptation (PA), school culture (SC), and community engagement (CE). Cronbach's alpha for the overall scale was 0.89; subscales ranged from 0.78 to 0.86, indicating good reliability.

2. **Open-Ended Interview Protocol:** Semi-structured questions probed definitions of inclusion, perceived challenges, and successful strategies. Ten administrators and twenty teachers (balanced by school type) provided richer narratives.
3. **Observation Checklist:** A brief checklist documented physical accessibility features, classroom displays, and evidence of student voice structures.

Data Collection and Ethics

Data were collected over three months (January–March 2025). Permissions were obtained from district authorities and school managements. Participants provided informed consent; parental consent was secured for students. Anonymity and confidentiality were ensured.

Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics (means, standard deviations) and inferential tests (independent samples t-tests) to compare school types. Qualitative data were thematically coded using an inductive approach, then mapped onto the five inclusion dimensions for integration with quantitative findings.

RESEARCH CONDUCTED AS A SURVEY

The central component was the survey administered to teachers and students. Sample items included: “Our school modifies teaching methods to suit different learning needs” (PA), “Students from all backgrounds feel accepted here” (SC), and “Parents are regularly involved in decisions about school improvement” (CE). Responses used a 5-point scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree). Administrators completed a shorter version focusing on policy and infrastructure.

Survey administration occurred in-person with paper forms in government schools and online in most private schools, reflecting differing ICT capacities. To mitigate response bias,

questionnaires were anonymous and clarified that honest answers would guide improvements, not evaluation.

RESULTS

Quantitative Findings

Mean scores (out of 5) by dimension and school type were as follows:

- **Policy Compliance (PC):** Government = 4.21 (SD = 0.51); Private = 3.74 (SD = 0.63); $t(390) = 7.22, p < .001$
- **Infrastructure Accessibility (IA):** Government = 3.32 (SD = 0.70); Private = 3.89 (SD = 0.58); $t(390) = -8.01, p < .001$
- **Pedagogical Adaptation (PA):** Government = 3.45 (SD = 0.64); Private = 3.92 (SD = 0.55); $t(390) = -7.03, p < .001$
- **School Culture (SC):** Government = 3.78 (SD = 0.60); Private = 3.85 (SD = 0.57); $t(390) = -1.21, p = .23$ (ns)
- **Community Engagement (CE):** Government = 3.96 (SD = 0.66); Private = 4.10 (SD = 0.59); $t(390) = -2.65, p = .008$

These results suggest that government schools outperform private schools on policy compliance, especially related to admissions and fee waivers, while private schools lead in infrastructure and pedagogical adaptations. Differences in school culture were not statistically significant, indicating both sectors have room for improvement in fostering day-to-day inclusivity. Community engagement scores were relatively high in both groups, with private schools leveraging structured PTAs and government schools tapping community resource persons and local governance bodies.

Qualitative Themes

1. **Policy vs. Practice Gap:** Government school leaders emphasize compliance with RTE mandates but note delays in resource release. Private school principals acknowledge the 25% reservation but cite documentation challenges as a barrier for families.
2. **Teacher Agency and Training:** Private school teachers report more autonomy to modify curricula, while government teachers rely on standardized lesson plans but benefit from state-sponsored training programs. Both groups request continuous, practice-oriented professional development.
3. **Student Voice and Peer Culture:** Students from both sectors highlight incidents of subtle exclusion (language mocking, socio-economic stereotyping). Schools that instituted student councils and peer mediation reported improved climates.
4. **Infrastructure as Enabler, Not Panacea:** Ramps and ICT labs exist in many private schools, yet without trained staff or inclusive pedagogy their impact is limited. Government schools with minimal infrastructure sometimes compensate through community volunteers and peer support systems.
5. **Parental Engagement Patterns:** Private schools hold frequent meetings but sometimes intimidate low-income parents. Government schools have lower turnout but involve parents through School Management Committees (SMCs), which can be tokenistic if not empowered.

Integration of Findings

The merged analysis shows that inclusion is multi-layered: structural compliance (where government schools excel) must be paired with responsive pedagogy (where private schools often innovate) and nurturing cultures (where both are middling). The management type alone does not guarantee inclusion; rather, leadership commitment, teacher capacity, and community partnership mediate outcomes.

CONCLUSION

This comparative study underscores that social inclusion in Indian schools is achievable when policy mandates, resource availability, and human relationships converge. Government schools demonstrate strength in adhering to inclusive policies, ensuring entry and retention of marginalized students. However, they require more flexible pedagogical tools and consistent infrastructure upgrades. Private schools, buoyed by relative resource autonomy, show promise in differentiated teaching and parental engagement but must deepen their commitment to the spirit—not just the letter—of inclusion mandates.

A hybrid, ecosystemic approach is recommended:

- **Policy Synergy:** Encourage joint government–private forums to share inclusive innovations and monitor policy impact.
- **Teacher Professional Development:** Establish cross-sector learning communities focused on UDL, multi-level teaching, and socio-emotional learning.
- **Student Voice Mechanisms:** Institutionalize student councils, peer mentoring, and grievance channels in both sectors to surface micro-exclusion early.
- **Data-Driven Improvement:** Use simple inclusion indices and dashboards for schools to self-assess and plan interventions.
- **Community Partnerships:** Mobilize NGOs, local bodies, and alumni to provide supplementary services—counseling, remedial tutoring, assistive technologies.

Ultimately, the question is not which system is superior but how each can learn from the other to build inclusive futures for all children. The findings invite policymakers, educators, and communities to reframe inclusion as a collaborative,

iterative process, responsive to local needs yet anchored in universal rights. By weaving together the strengths of both private and government schools, India can move closer to an education system where every learner genuinely belongs and thrives.

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