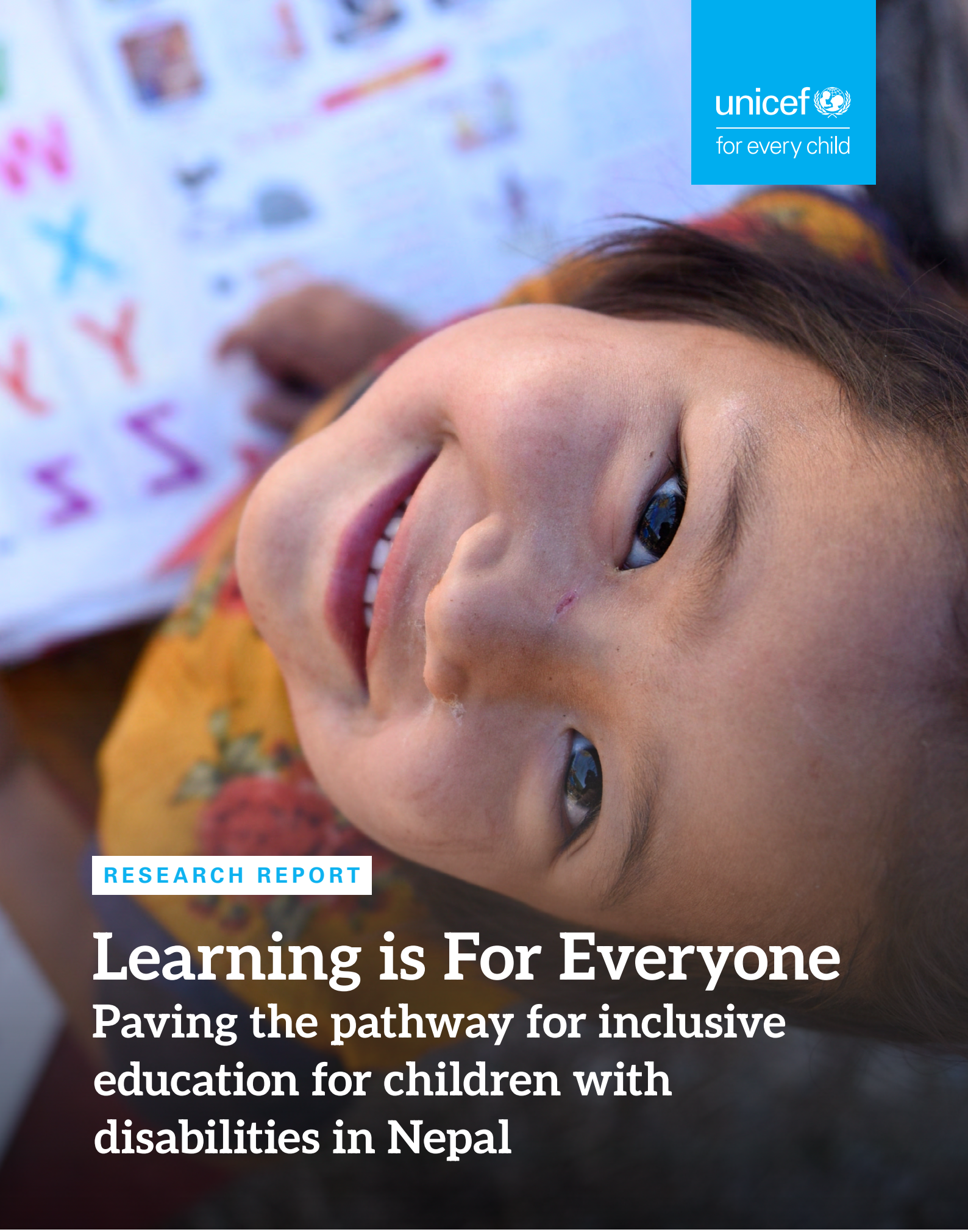

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RESEARCH REPORT

Learning is For Everyone

Paving the pathway for inclusive education for children with disabilities in Nepal

Centre for Education and Human Resource Department

UNICEF OFFICE OF STRATEGY AND EVIDENCE - INNOCENTI JANUARY 2026

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Acronyms and abbreviations

ADT	Accessible Digital Textbook
CDC	Curriculum Development Center
CEHRD	Center for Education and Human Resource Development
CRPD	Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
DMIS	Disability Management Information System
ERO	Education Review Office
ESC	Education Scalability Checklist
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
IEMIS	Integrated Educational Management Information System
IEP	Individualized Educational Plan
LiFE	Learning is For Everyone
MoEST	Ministry of Education, Science and Technology
NFDN	National Federation of the Disabled Nepal
NGO	Non-Governmental Organizations
NMICS	Nepal Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey
OPD	Organization of Persons with Disabilities
SATC	Student Assessment Technical Committee
SESP	School Education Sector Plan
TPD	Teacher Professional Development
UDL	Universal Design for Learning
WG	Washington Group

Executive summary

Quality disability-inclusive education is essential to ensure equitable access, meaningful learning and the active participation of children with disabilities in the education system. It safeguards the right to education for one of the most vulnerable and frequently excluded groups of children. As defined in General Comment No. 4 of Article 24 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), inclusive education requires systemic transformation – spanning curriculum, teaching methods, school structures and strategies – to meet the diverse needs and preferences of all learners.

Across South Asia, efforts to promote inclusive education are growing; yet children with disabilities continue to face significant barriers, including unreliable data, discriminatory attitudes and limited access to inclusive learning materials. Nepal has shown notable progress, through strong legal frameworks, international commitments and a range of small-scale initiatives aimed at improving disability-inclusive education. However, policy inconsistencies, fragmented data systems and challenges in coordination and scaling efforts still hinder full inclusion.

In response, the Learning is For Everyone (LiFE) research project – led collaboratively by UNICEF Nepal, UNICEF Innocenti – Global Office of Research and Foresight, and the Center for Education and Human Resource Development (CEHRD) – was launched to identify strengths and challenges within Nepal's education system and provide evidence-based, context-specific recommendations for system transformation. The study aimed to identify, understand and explore strategies to scale up good practices in disability-inclusive education identified across four Nepalese provinces: Bagmati, Karnali, Koshi and Lumbini. It followed a mixed-methods approach, which included in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, classroom observations, digital surveys and an Education Scalability Checklist. Findings were organized in five themes, chosen in alignment with Nepal's School Education Sector Plan 2022/23–2030/31, which outlines these as the criteria for assessing the extent of inclusivity in schools:

1. Individualized education plans (IEPs)
2. Early screening
3. Curriculum and instruction differentiation
4. Teacher training in disability-inclusive education
5. Physical accessibility

Based on the findings, five policy recommendations were developed in consultation with key stakeholders, including: CEHRD; the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MoEST); organizations of persons with disabilities; non-governmental organizations; donor agencies; and civil society organizations. Each recommendation was accompanied by specific actions and short-, medium- and long-term goals to guide implementation and ensure sustainable progress towards inclusive education for all.

Policy recommendations

1. Standardize early screening and institutionalize IEPs to ensure timely support for all students with disabilities.

Findings highlight both promising practices and persistent challenges in disability screening and the use of IEPs in Nepal. While over 40 per cent of head teachers and 52 per cent of teachers reported that students had been screened – mostly by health institutions and government agencies – only 18 per cent of surveyed teachers had received training to conduct screenings themselves. Good practices in IEP implementation were observed in a few schools, where teachers followed structured guidelines and collaborated with parents and specialists. However, such practices remain limited, with most teachers lacking sufficient training and confidence to develop and apply IEPs effectively. Additionally, screening processes are often delayed or inaccurate, especially for children with multiple disabilities, leading to misidentification and inadequate support.

Action 1: Unify identification and screening efforts by strengthening the Student Assessment Technical Committee (SATC).

- **Short term:** Conduct a comprehensive mapping of existing early screening and identification efforts across provinces and local governments.

- **Medium term:** Based on the mapping, revise and update screening guidelines, protocols and budget allocations. Ensure effective and correct introduction of data into the Integrated Educational Management Information System (IEMIS) and adequate resource allocations.

- **Long term:** Institutionalize the unified screening system nationwide, with the SATC serving as the permanent coordinating body.

Action 2: Establish standardized guidelines to ensure effective implementation of IEPs in full alignment with inclusive education principles.

- **Short term:** Review and revise the existing guidelines for designing and implementing IEPs to ensure that they are standardized, user-friendly and fully aligned with inclusive education principles. Design IEP templates and user-friendly guides to facilitate implementation.

- **Medium term:** Pilot the revised IEP guidelines, templates and user-friendly guides to assess their feasibility and effectiveness. Once they are piloted, train teachers to implement them effectively.

- **Long term:** Institutionalize the reviewed guidelines and templates, and roll them out nationwide. Ensure that they are integrated into teacher training programmes and school planning processes.

2. Fully institutionalize Universal Design for Learning (UDL) principles within the national curriculum, alongside a standardized curriculum accommodations framework, to ensure that the diverse needs of all students with disabilities are addressed effectively.

Most teachers who were surveyed agreed that the national curriculum aligns with inclusive principles; at the same time, interviews confirmed the use of a single curriculum for all students but the implementation of wide range of accommodations tailored to individual needs. These included accessible learning materials, specialist support and adapted assessments. Classroom observations revealed the use of inclusive teaching methodologies, such as varied content delivery formats (visual, tactile, oral), real-life examples, repetition and adjusted pacing. These practices reflect alignment with UDL principles, with teachers actively promoting participation and comprehension through clear objectives, interactive questioning and multisensory tools.

Despite these promising practices, challenges remain in resource availability and specialist support. Teachers often create learning materials using locally available items, because of limited access to resources, especially for students with complex disabilities. Information and communication technology (ICT) tools and assistive devices are unevenly distributed across schools, and while some institutions benefit from external support, others lack basic supplies or training to use available technologies effectively. Specialist support – such as speech therapists and sign language interpreters – is highly valued but insufficient in frequency and coverage. Teachers and parents emphasized the need for more specialists and more training in sign language to improve communication and learning outcomes.

Action 1: Fully institutionalize UDL as a system-wide approach in Nepal.

- **Short term:** Conduct a nationwide mapping of both the challenges and the promising practices in implementing UDL, with a focus on teacher training, material accessibility and regional disparities.

- **Medium term:** Systematize the good practices identified and assess their potential to address current gaps.

- **Long term:** Institutionalize the identification and documentation of UDL practices as regular functions within national education monitoring and quality assurance systems.

Action 2: Consolidate existing curriculum accommodations into a unified and institutionalized protocol, which effectively addresses the needs of all students with disabilities.

- **Short term:** Document existing curriculum accommodations, with the goal of unifying them into a comprehensive protocol.

- **Medium term:** Pilot the menu of accommodations across diverse provinces to test feasibility and contextual relevance.

- **Long term:** Roll out the curriculum accommodations protocol nationwide, making it mandatory for all teachers to be trained in its implementation.

Action 3: Ensure human and material resources (teaching-learning materials and specialists) for the successful implementation of curriculum accommodations.

- **Short term:** Conduct a comprehensive mapping and diagnosis of existing educational resources and practices. Additionally, advance efforts to ratify the Marrakesh Treaty to facilitate the production and exchange of texts in accessible formats.

- **Medium term:** Mobilize resources and build capacities to ensure the sustainability of designing and producing accessible teaching-learning materials.

- **Long term:** Institutionalize and scale up the use of inclusive resources and practices nationwide.

3. Institutionalize inclusive and flexible assessment guidelines.

Most parents, teachers and students – both with and without disabilities – reported that assessment questions are generally the same for all students. However, a range of accommodations (adjustments to the environment, materials, or assessment process that do not alter learning goals) and modifications (changes to assessment content or to expectations about what a student is required to learn) are applied based on individual needs. These include the use of scribes, Braille or oral formats for students with visual impairments, simplified language for deaf students, and extra time or separate exam rooms to create a more supportive environment. While these practices reflect efforts towards inclusive assessment, many parents remain unfamiliar with the procedures, and teachers face challenges owing to limited resources and uncertainty about how to adapt assessments, especially in subjects like mathematics and Nepali.

Action 1: Institutionalize guidelines on inclusive and flexible assessment accommodations and modifications for all types of disabilities, in all official assessments.

- **Short term:** Map and consolidate the existing assessment accommodations and modifications, applied across the country by type of disability, into a formal guideline, clearly distinguishing between accommodations and modifications.

- **Medium term:** Pilot the full set of accommodations and modifications – including both existing and newly proposed ones – in different provinces of the country, to ensure their feasibility and relevance.

- **Long term:** Gradually roll out the inclusive assessment guidelines to schools nationwide, prioritizing those schools with a higher percentage of students with disabilities.

4. Strengthen the teaching workforce by promoting disability-inclusive training opportunities for teachers and head teachers, and by enhancing the recruitment of teachers with disabilities.

Findings from the digital surveys indicate that only a small proportion of surveyed teachers (8 per cent) and head teachers (7 per cent) reported receiving training in disability-inclusive education, with most having participated in in-service programmes. Teachers who received training found it beneficial, especially in areas like behaviour management, UDL and strategies for teaching students with specific disabilities. However, many teachers noted that training was often too short, lacked subject-specific inclusive strategies and excluded temporary or relief teachers. Teachers expressed a strong need for regular, practical and specialized training tailored to different disabilities, grades and subjects.

Head teachers play a critical role in promoting disability-inclusive education by encouraging teachers to pursue training and fostering inclusive attitudes within schools. Their leadership influences school planning, resource mobilization and access to support services for students with disabilities. Teachers reported feeling more confident and supported when head teachers actively prioritized inclusion, highlighting the importance of school-level leadership in driving systemic change.

Action 1: Ensure comprehensive, periodic, updated, hands-on and specific training in disability-inclusive education for pre-service and in-service teachers.

- **Short term:** Review, unify and update the existing Teacher Professional Development (TPD) curriculum to ensure that it addresses fully the training needs of teachers in disability-inclusive education.

- **Medium term:** In collaboration with key stakeholders – including the Education Development and Coordination Unit, the MoEST, CEHRD and local governments – budget for, and conduct design of, the missing courses.

- **Long term:** Pilot the new courses and formally embed them into the TPD certification framework.

Action 2: Deliver pre-service and in-service training to strengthen head teachers' leadership in disability-inclusive education.

- **Short term:** Map the promising practices and experiences of head teachers – both with and without disabilities –who have successfully promoted disability-inclusive education in their schools..

- **Medium term:** Formalize these collaborative sessions into structured training programmes for head teachers.

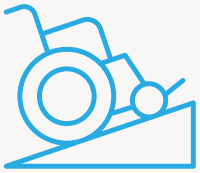
- **Long term:** Embed the head teacher training courses into the TPD framework.

Action 3: Strengthen the recruitment of teachers with disabilities.

- **Short term:** Strengthen inclusive practices in initial teacher training programmes by expanding access, support and leadership for persons with disabilities.

- **Medium term:** Institutionalize inclusive hiring practices for teachers.

- **Long term:** Strengthen systems for monitoring, feedback and policy refinement, to promote the recruitment and retention of teachers with disabilities.



5. Enhance the accessibility of school infrastructure

Nepal's 2013 Accessible Physical Infrastructure and Communication Service Directive for People with Disabilities set mandatory standards for eliminating physical and informational barriers for persons with disabilities across sectors, including education. However, research findings reveal persistent accessibility challenges in schools, such as limited infrastructure, overcrowded classrooms and inadequate features beyond ground-floor access, which restrict participation for students and teachers with disabilities. While some schools have ramps and accessible toilets, their quality and coverage vary widely, and many students still rely on personal assistance for mobility and basic needs. Classroom observations and interviews further highlighted the lack of tactile materials, insufficient assistive devices, and limited use of ICT tools because of resource constraints and a lack of training. Transportation also emerged as a major barrier, with high costs and poor accessibility contributing to absenteeism and dropout rates.

Action 1: Develop an accessibility checklist and update enforcement mechanisms, to ensure accountability and alignment with the standardized accessibility guidelines as outlined in Nepal's 2013 Accessible Physical Infrastructure and Communication Service Directive for People with Disabilities.

- **Short term:** Design an accessibility checklist specifically for educational institutions that is aligned with the standards detailed in the current policy and UDL principles.
- **Medium term:** Train auditors in how to use the checklist and feedback templates effectively, and establish mechanisms to ensure accountability and quality control.
- **Long term:** Pilot the checklist in various provinces and geographical areas to test its feasibility and relevance. Once validated, roll it out nationwide, prioritizing schools with older infrastructure and lower levels of accessibility.

Concluding remarks

The LiFE research in Nepal identified several good practices in disability-inclusive education, reflecting the country's growing commitment to building a more equitable and responsive education system. These promising practices emerged across key areas, including the implementation of IEPs, curriculum flexibility, the effective application of accommodations and modifications, and teacher training in inclusive education. Teachers' innovative use of locally available materials and of multisensory and participatory teaching strategies, and their collaboration with parents and specialists, further highlights the potential for these practices to be scaled up and sustained. To build on these achievements, however, sustained efforts and strong cross-ministerial collaboration are essential. Advancing these practices requires close coordination among the CEHRD, the MoEST, the Ministry of Health and Population, and the Ministry of Women, Children and Senior Citizens, among others, to unify screening systems, ensure consistent teacher preparation, and to mobilize resources for accessible infrastructure and assistive technologies. Institutionalizing these collaborative mechanisms will be key to transforming promising local initiatives and small-scale projects into national standards, fostering an education system where every learner – regardless of individual characteristics – receives the necessary support to participate fully, learn effectively and thrive.

CHAPTER 1

Background

Barriers to accessing education and achieving quality learning for children with disabilities persist worldwide. Despite steady increases in school attendance and completion rates over the past 20 years, children with disabilities still face major barriers in accessing quality education.[1] The South Asia region has the third-largest proportion of children with disabilities globally (64.4 million, or 11 per cent) following West and Central Africa (15 per cent) and the Middle East and North Africa (13 per cent).[2] The proportion of persons with disabilities in South Asia vary widely among the region's populations, ranging from 1.4 per cent to 13 per cent of the total population, and access to education remains a significant challenge.[3] The most recent data, from 2018, show that approximately 29 million (or 7 per cent of) children in South Asia – 12.5 million at the primary level (3 per cent) and 16.5 million at the secondary level (4 per cent) – were unable to access education, with a substantial proportion being children with disabilities.[4]

Growing commitment to inclusive education has been observed in the region through the establishment of regulations, primarily disability and general education laws in each country that advocate for the rights of children with disabilities and their access to education. All countries with School Education Sector Plans (SESPs) recognize the right of children with disabilities to education, either through mainstreaming in general classes – which aligns with inclusion principles – or through special education, which does not align with inclusion principles. Additionally, most South Asian countries acknowledge the importance of fostering inclusive practices and environments for children with disabilities.[5]

Despite these efforts, barriers to achieving inclusive education persist. One significant issue is the quality of statistics on children with disabilities, as current data across the region are neither reliable nor comparable, making it difficult to identify needs accurately. There are also negative attitudes and discriminatory practices against children with disabilities, affecting both access to, and quality of, education. Furthermore, the quality of education for children with disabilities is hindered by the lack of accessible learning and teaching materials, assistive devices, and flexible teaching methods such as Universal Design for Learning (UDL), which is not widely applied as a key principle in many countries' plans for children with disabilities.[6] These barriers highlight the need for governments to promote both supply- and demand-side initiatives to support an inclusive education system. This includes multisectoral and multi-ministerial dialogues and policies, as well as developing institutions specifically responsible for inclusive education.[7]

Nepal has demonstrated a strong commitment to inclusive education over the years, evident through various regulations and policies aimed at advocating for the rights of persons with disabilities and enhancing access to, and the quality of learning for, children with disabilities (*see Figure 1*). These efforts are underscored by the country's adherence to international conventions, such as the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) (2006), ratified by Nepal in 2009. Legislative measures like the Constitution of Nepal (2015) and the

Compulsory and Free Basic Education Act (2018) highlight Nepal's commitment to providing free basic education to all children, including free higher education and free education through Braille scripts and sign language for children with disabilities. This commitment is further reinforced by regulations such as the 2013 accessibility policy, 'Accessible Physical Infrastructure and Communication Service Directive for People with Disabilities', which specifies minimum technical accessible standards for all public infrastructure (including schools), and the School Sector Development Plan 2016–2021, which aimed to raise awareness about education for children with disabilities, increase early screening, and enhance collaboration between the health and education ministries so as to transition from special and segregated services to inclusive education (*see Box 1*).

BOX 1

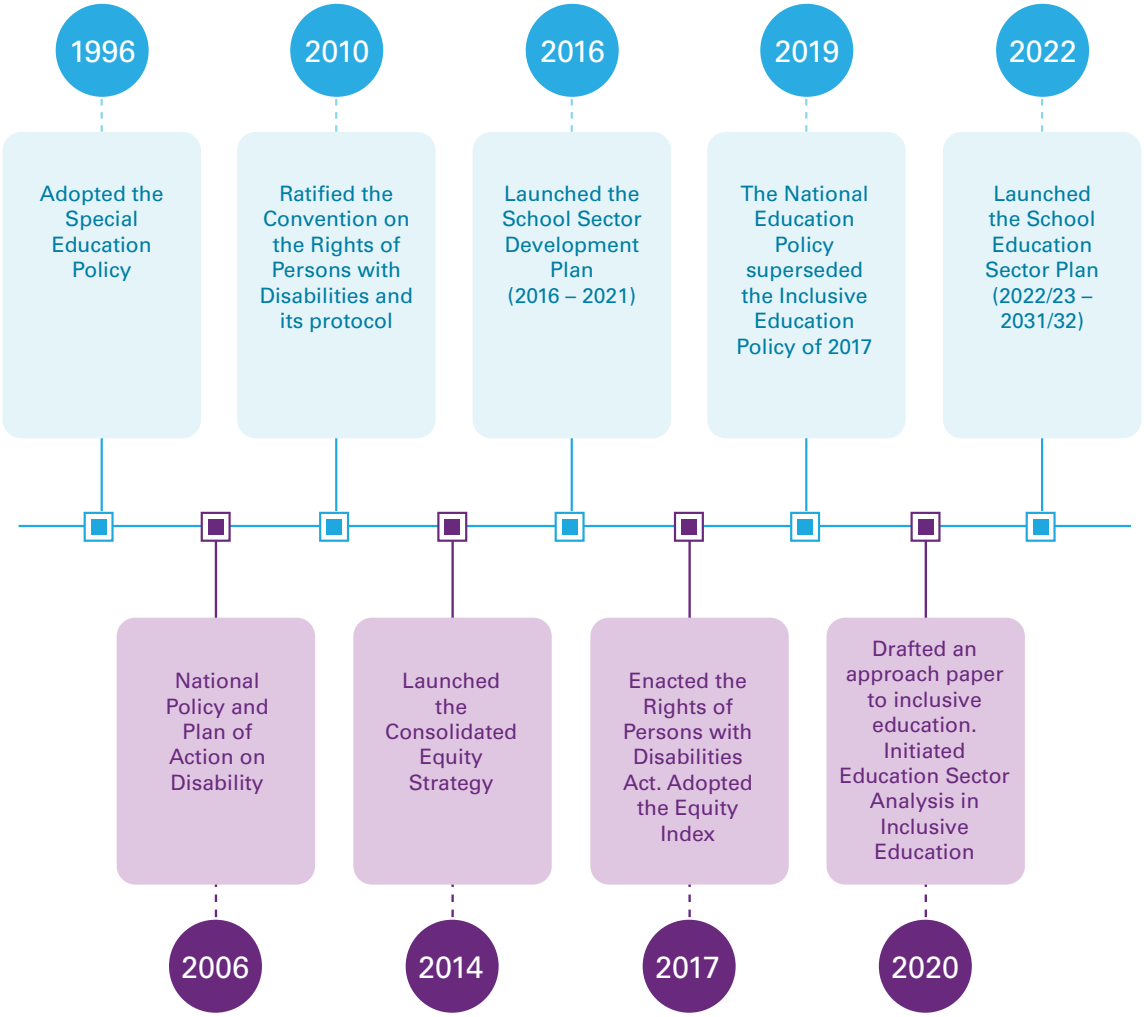
Stages towards inclusive education

- **Exclusion:** Students with disabilities are entirely excluded from the formal education system.
- **Segregation:** Education is provided in separate settings for students with disabilities, isolating them from their peers without disabilities (e.g., special schools).
- **Integration:** Students with disabilities are placed in mainstream schools but without adequate adjustments to support their learning needs (e.g., special classrooms within mainstream schools).
- **Inclusion:** Educational environments are intentionally designed and adapted to enable students with disabilities to participate actively and learn. This involves modifications to school infrastructure, teaching methods, curriculum and the overall school culture.

Source: Adapted from United Nations Children's Fund, 'Inclusive Education: Understanding Article 24 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities', UNICEF, n.p., September 2017

Additionally, Nepal's SESP for 2022/23–2030/31 aims to bolster inclusive education by transforming the existing 380 resource classes into inclusive education resource hubs within respective local governments. This initiative reflects a positive step towards broader inclusion. However, the 2019 National Education Policy – which replaced the more explicitly inclusive 2017 Inclusive Education Policy – presents some challenges in alignment. While the 2019 policy expresses support for inclusive education, it does not provide detailed implementation strategies, and it includes elements that may unintentionally shift focus back towards special schools and resource classes, potentially limiting opportunities for full inclusion. Moreover, the policy could benefit from clearer guidance on addressing key barriers, such as the shortage of trained teachers, the limited availability of accessible learning materials, and the absence of a comprehensive framework to support local governments in implementing inclusive practices. Although decentralization is emphasized, the 2019 policy does not yet specify the resources, responsibilities or mechanisms needed to ensure effective and equitable implementation – leaving room for further development in planning and accountability.[8,9,10]

Figure 1: Key milestones in inclusive education in Nepal



Source: Author's illustration of key milestones in inclusive education in Nepal

The progression from special to inclusive education in Nepal is evident in the range of educational provisions available for children with disabilities. These provisions include non-formal education, special schools and integrated schools with resource classrooms. Non-formal education provides alternative learning opportunities for children facing barriers to formal education, often supported by local communities, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and educational institutions. Special schools, which fall under the category of 'segregation', offer disability-specific instruction tailored to individual needs, while resource classrooms within mainstream schools, which fall under the category of 'integration', provide targeted support, aiming to integrate students with disabilities into regular classes after two to three years of specialized

instruction.[11] Additionally, there have been efforts to develop inclusive schools, but these schools often end up functioning as integrated schools. Residential facilities are also available for children with disabilities who cannot attend their nearest school on a daily basis.[12]

Accurate data on children with disabilities are crucial for identifying their needs and developing effective policies. In Nepal – as in many other South Asian countries – there remains a significant need for more comprehensive data on this population. Major sources of disability statistics in Nepal include national censuses, the Nepal Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (NMICS) and the Integrated Education Management Information System (IEMIS).[13] These sources use different methodologies for identifying and measuring disability, which makes comparisons challenging (*see Table 1*). The inclusion of the Washington Group (WG) questions in the 2019 NMICS, the piloting of these questions in the IEMIS and the development of a dedicated sub-system focused on disability reflect meaningful progress towards harmonizing data collection and improving comparability. These efforts are both notable and necessary, given the current fragmentation in data sources and the resulting variation in reported numbers of persons with disabilities in Nepal.

Table 1: Different types of methodologies and measuring per data collection type

DATA COLLECTION ACTIVITY/SYSTEM	RESPONSIBLE AGENCY	FREQUENCY	TYPOLOGY OF DISABILITY / FUNCTIONAL DIFFICULTY	ADOPTED WG QUESTIONS
Integrated Education Management System (IEMS)	Center for Education and Human Resource Development (CEHRD) and Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MoEST)	Biannual	**7 types of disability,** *plus multiple disability*: physical; mental; hearing-impaired; visually impaired; low vision; hearing and visual-impaired; vocal and speech-related disability	At the pilot stage
National Population and Housing Census	Central Bureau of Statistics	Every 10 years	(2021 Census) **12 types of disability** including multiple disability: physical disability; blind; low sight; deaf; low hearing disability; hearing and sight, voice and speech-related disability; autism; psychosocial disability; intellectual disability; hereditary bleeding; and multiple disability	No
Nepal Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (NMICS)	Central Bureau of Statistics and UNICEF	No information available	**8 functional domains** for 2–4 year olds **13 domains** for 5–17 year olds **6 domains** for 18–49 year olds * All 3 groups included the functional domains of seeing, hearing, walking and communication.	Yes

Source: Adapted from Peter Grimes et al., Disability-Inclusive Education Practices in Nepal, UNICEF, Kathmandu, 2021, and UNICEF Nepal, 'The Situation of Children with Disabilities in Nepal', UNICEF Nepal, Kathmandu, 2021.

NMICS collects data on child functioning for all children under the age of 18, using two different questionnaires: one for children under 5, and another for those aged 5–17 years. For children aged two to four years, the functional domains assessed include: seeing, hearing, walking, communication, learning, controlling behaviour, fine motor skills and playing. For children aged 5–17 years, the domains expand to include: seeing, hearing, walking, communication, learning, behaviour regulation, self-care, memory, concentration, accepting change, making friends, anxiety and depression.[14] The 2019 NMICS revealed that approximately 11 per cent of Nepali children aged 2–17 years had a functional difficulty in at least one domain and were disproportionately represented among out-of-school children.[15,16] Furthermore, NMICS identified that among two- to four-year olds, common functional difficulties included learning, walking and communication challenges.[i]

i The term 'children with functional difficulties' refers to those identified through NMICS using the Child Functioning Module, based on observed challenges in daily activities. 'Children with disabilities' refers to those children with formally diagnosed impairments. The distinction is maintained to reflect differences in data sources and definitions.

Additionally, school attendance rates for three- to four-year olds with functional difficulties were 25 per cent lower for early childhood education, compared with their peers without functional difficulties.[17]

For children aged 5–17 years, anxiety (3 per cent) and depression (11 per cent) are the most frequently reported functional difficulties, with significant disparities based on age, gender and caste/ethnicity. Although school attendance rates for children with/without functional difficulties are similar, those with functional difficulties are less likely to have ever attended school or advanced through grades; this is particularly so for those children with mobility, vision and hearing impairments. The NMICS findings also highlight the crucial role of parental and school support, noting deficiencies in assistance with homework and reduced benefits from school management committees for children with functional difficulties.[18]

Furthermore, in addition to the progress outlined above, disability-inclusive education in Nepal has been promoted actively through a range of past and ongoing initiatives, including small-scale projects, many of which are led by international organizations. Box 2 outlines the focus, scope and reach of selected programmes and initiatives supporting disability-inclusive education across the country.

Despite the existence of these efforts, most programmes and initiatives are not implemented at a national scale, meaning that many schools and teachers still require support to ensure the full inclusion of children with disabilities throughout the system. That being the case, the aim of this research was to identify the strengths and challenges existing in Nepal's education system, with regard to achieving inclusion, and to provide context-specific, evidence-based recommendations on how to achieve system transformation towards this goal. This was done by identifying a pathway to scale up existing good practices in disability-inclusive education, in addition to understanding the challenges that may limit their implementation at scale. The research was conducted collaboratively by UNICEF Nepal, UNICEF Innocenti – Global Office of Research and Foresight, and the Center for Education and Human Resources Development (CEHRD), as part of the Learning is For Everyone (LiFE) research project.

BOX 2

Examples of prior and current disability-inclusive education programmes/initiatives in Nepal

- **SAHAYATRA (Strengthening civil society organization for resilient and inclusive education governance in Nepal) project (2021–2024):** This initiative strengthens civil society for inclusive education governance, focusing on children aged 3–10 years, especially girls and children with disabilities, in Bara, Rautahat, Parsa and Sarlahi districts. It reached around 10,000 students and parents, and trained 120 teachers.[19]

- **School-at-Home Initiative:** It focuses on providing home-based education for children with disabilities unable to attend school because of infrastructure and teacher-related barriers.[20]

- **Sikai Project (2018–2024):** Funded by Australian Aid and implemented by Handicap International and partners, this project promotes inclusive education through infrastructure upgrades and community engagement in 58 schools and 23 madrasas in Sarlahi.[21]

- **Strengthening Inclusive Education in Nepal Project:** Operating in 154 schools in Kalika and Bharatpur, this initiative focuses on teacher training and improving access to education for children with disabilities aged 3–14 years.[22]

- **United States Agency for International Development's Reading for All Nepal Program:** This programme aimed to build government capacity for disability-inclusive education, improve data systems and pilot inclusive reading models. It has screened 562,000 children, and trained 720 teachers and 400 officials across 10 districts.[23]

CHAPTER 2

Methodology

The goal of the LiFE research in Nepal focused on identifying, understanding and scaling up existing best practices in disability-inclusive education, as well as on identifying challenges that hinder their scale-up across four provinces of the country: Bagmati, Lumbini, Karnali and Koshi. These provinces were identified and selected with CEHRD to ensure diversity of school type, geographic conditions and contextual settings. The research was co-designed from its inception for the Nepali context with local stakeholders, including representatives from CEHRD, the MoEST, organizations of persons with disabilities (OPDs), NGOs and academia. Their involvement informed the development of the research questions, methodology, tools and recommendations.

Research questions

The LiFE research followed a mixed-methods approach to answer the following questions:

1. What effective practices in disability-inclusive education are currently implemented in schools across various contexts in Nepal?

2. What specific classroom-, school- or system-level factors contribute to the effectiveness of these practices?

3. What strategies at the classroom or school level can facilitate the scaling-up of successful practices to promote disability-inclusive education in Nepal?

Methodological approach

The research was conducted in three phases, as follows.

Phase 1: Identification of schools with good practices in disability-inclusive education

This phase focused on identifying schools that demonstrated good practices in disability-inclusive education. The process of identification began with a desk review, to map existing initiatives and practices in the field. A workshop with key stakeholders then took place, to determine the provinces and the priority thematic areas for the research. In collaboration with these stakeholders, good practices were conceptualized as those that advanced inclusive education – guided by the definition of inclusive education provided in General Comment No. 4 of the CRPD. Specifically, it was agreed that practices would be identified across six key areas: (1) inclusive teaching and learning materials, (2) teacher training, (3) accessible infrastructure, (4) early screening, (5) inclusive teaching methodologies and (6) assessment approaches. Based on this shared understanding, data collection tools were developed to ensure comprehensive exploration

of these government priorities. Additionally, based on the criteria established during this phase, CEHRD selected 20 schools to serve as case study schools for exploration in Phase 2. The selection ensured diversity in terms of school types, disabilities represented and geographical areas, allowing for a more comprehensive understanding of inclusive practices across different contexts.

Phase 2: Identification of factors shaping good practices

This phase aimed to identify and understand classroom-, school- and system-level factors influencing good practices in disability-inclusive education. Methods included classroom observations, interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs) with key actors in the chosen 20 schools:

- **Classroom observations:** Two classroom observations were conducted in each of the 20 schools. Among these schools, three were home-based, which presented specific limitations. In one case, classroom observation was not feasible, owing to the nature of the home-based setting. In the other two cases, observations were carried out in the formal schools responsible for overseeing the home-schooling programmes. Thus, not all items on the classroom observation checklist could be assessed in these instances. Data collectors used a comprehensive observation matrix, adapted from validated tools designed to assess inclusive practices in early childhood education and primary-level classrooms.[24,25,26,27] The matrix focused on four key domains: classroom culture, social-emotional skills, instruction, and the accessibility and adequacy of the physical environment. Each domain was evaluated using both quantitative ratings (on a scale from 1 to 5) and qualitative descriptors ('low', 'medium', 'high'). These two scoring systems were aligned: scores of 1–2 indicated a low level of inclusive practices, 3 represented a medium level, and scores of 4–5 reflected a high level. In addition to the observation matrix, data collectors completed a background information checklist to assess general classroom characteristics relevant to inclusive education. This included the availability of inclusive resources at both the school and classroom levels.

- **Interviews:** Interviews were conducted with two teachers and two students with disabilities in each school, aiming for diversity in disability types. Teachers with and without disabilities were included. Additionally, three FGDs per school were held, one with parents of students with disabilities, another one with parents of students without disabilities, and a third one with students without disabilities (see Annex A for more details on the sample). Accommodations for students with disabilities, such as sign language interpreters, were provided as needed.

Phase 3: Scaling up good practices.

This phase focused on determining the steps needed to scale up identified best practices:

- **Surveys:** Questionnaires were developed and administered to teachers and head teachers via an online platform, with consent obtained digitally before participation. Educators from all provinces in Nepal were invited to participate in the survey, which aimed to gain a deeper understanding of the status of disability-inclusive practices across the country. This understanding was essential for identifying tasks and considerations when designing the action plan using the Education Scalability Checklist (ESC) tool to scale up the good practices identified. The final sample consisted of 191 head teachers and 339 teachers. It is worth noting that most respondents were based in Bagmati Province (38 per cent of head teachers and 25 per cent of teachers) and Koshi Province (24 per cent of head teachers and 33 per cent of teachers). Most participants were in rural areas: 84 per cent of head teachers and 76 per cent of teachers. (*See Annex B* for more details on the sample.)

- **Scale-up assessment:** A two-and-a-half-day workshop was held from 10 August to 12 August 2025, focused on assessing the potential for scaling up identified good practices. The ESC was used as the primary tool for guiding the assessment and facilitating discussions among participants. The Brookings Center for Universal Education developed the ESC in order to assess

how easy, or difficult, it would be to scale up the best practices identified. The workshop engaged key stakeholders, including representatives from CEHRD, the MoEST, OPDs, NGOs, donor agencies, civil society organizations and international organizations. Participants scored the ESC in groups. An action plan was developed among all stakeholders detailing the necessary steps, responsibilities and timeline for scaling up the good practices identified in disability-inclusive education. (For more information about the ESC outcomes, see Annex C).

Limitations

The survey was disseminated by CEHRD using various strategies, including posting the survey link on CEHRD's website and organizing meetings with education heads from different provinces. However, the response rate was lower than anticipated, largely the result of a national teachers' strike occurring around the same time.

Interviews and FGDs took place in Nepali or local languages. They were later translated into English, which may have resulted in the loss of some nuances. Additionally, many students with disabilities reside in school-provided hostels, while their families live in remote areas. In several cases, it was difficult – or not possible – to reach the parents to invite them to participate in the FGDs. Also, although accommodations were provided during interviews with students who had intellectual and multiple disabilities, additional support would have been beneficial to ensure fuller participation.

For classroom observations, two enumerators were assigned per classroom, to take qualitative notes and to assign quantitative scores to each behaviour assessed. However, class sizes ranged from 5 to 40 students, and observing larger classes posed greater challenges for accurate and thorough data collection.

CHAPTER 3

Policy recommendations

The policy recommendations presented in this section were developed during a technical workshop held in in August 2025, in Kathmandu, with the participation of technical representatives from CEHRD, the MoEST, academia, NGOs, international organizations and OPDs. During the workshop, research results from the three phases were presented, discussed and endorsed by participants. Findings were organized in five themes, chosen in alignment with the SESP 2022/23–2030/31, which outlines these as the criteria for assessing inclusivity in schools in Nepal:

1. Individualized education plans (IEPs)
2. Early screening
3. Curriculum and instruction differentiation
4. Teacher training in disability-inclusive education
5. Physical accessibility

In addition, the ESC tool was applied to assess how easy or difficult it would be to scale up good practices in disability-inclusive education identified in the research. Building on these insights, policy recommendations were co-created in the identified areas of improvement while considering and building on the good practices identified for disability-inclusive education.

This section presents the five key recommendations. Each recommendation includes:

- a summary of the main findings from the three phases of the research that informed its development, with relevant good practices highlighted in each area; and
- specific actions for implementation, along with short-, medium- and long-term goals.

Additionally, good practices that emerged during the research but fall outside the scope of the five main areas are featured in dedicated boxes throughout this section.

1. Standardize early screening and institutionalize IEPs to ensure timely support for all students with disabilities.

Early screening is essential for timely identification of the educational needs of students with disabilities and for planning appropriate support measures. Findings from the LiFE research highlighted good practices in the design and implementation of IEPs, which are used as tools to help students achieve learning goals by building on their strengths and addressing their specific challenges. Yet, there are several challenges in conducting early screening across provinces, including the absence of clear mechanisms and frequent misidentification (or under-identification) of cases – particularly in instances of multiple disabilities – owing to limited specialized knowledge among medical professionals.

Which findings support this policy recommendation?

More than 4 in 10 head teachers and 52 per cent of teachers surveyed report that their students have been screened for disabilities. According to both groups of teachers, the two organizations that typically conduct these screenings are health institutions and government agencies.

Among surveyed teachers, 36 per cent frequently conduct disability screenings themselves, 33 per cent occasionally perform them, 21 per cent have never conducted one, and 10 per cent rarely conduct them. Nearly 2 in every 10 teachers surveyed reported having received training to screen students for disabilities. Similarly, 21 per cent of head teachers confirmed that their teachers had received such training. Local governments were reported as the primary providers of this training, in most cases.

Good practices and clear guidelines were observed in the implementation of IEPs in a few schools in Bagmati. These practices are characterized by using IEPs as tools to guide teachers in addressing the educational needs of students with disabilities and achieving learning outcomes. In these schools, teachers explained that they follow a clear guideline for implementing IEPs. An initial assessment is conducted upon a pupil's enrolment, followed by a detailed functional assessment to determine the child's abilities and challenges. These assessments are reviewed every three, four or twelve months, depending on individual circumstances. Based on the results, an IEP is created – similar to a lesson plan – tailored to show what the child can learn and how best to support their progress. The IEP outlines learning goals, the required supports, the necessary resources, and the strategies for achieving the planned goals. Teachers also emphasized that they design IEPs in collaboration with other teachers, parents, specialists (e.g., speech therapists and physiotherapists) and doctors. This cooperation fosters collaborative work among key stakeholders.

QUOTE

Firstly, after the child has been enrolled in the school and after conducting the assessment of the child, we find out what weaknesses the child has and what their capacity to perform tasks is. By evaluating both aspects, we can set a goal and create an IEP. The IEP will focus on the child's specific needs and the work they need to do. When creating the IEP, the parents, teachers, and especially the doctor should be involved. [...] A physiotherapist also sits when designing the IEP. When designing the IEP, the tasks that need to be done by the physiotherapist are handled by the physiotherapist, the tasks that need to be done by the educators are handled by the educators, and those aspects that need to come from the parents are included with the parents' input.

Teacher
Special school, Bagmati Province

However, across the different provinces, interviewed participants reported several challenges in the screening process. In most cases, families are the first to notice signs of risk, and the screening process may take longer than expected –especially in cases of multiple disabilities, where misidentification is common. Participants also noted that municipalities conduct screenings when children with disabilities are registered to obtain a disability card. However, this process faces challenges as some children go unidentified or misidentified; again, this is particularly so in cases of multiple disabilities. As a result, children may be registered with an incorrect disability type, which hinders their access to appropriate support services.

As previously mentioned, challenges in early screening and detection directly affect the ability to identify and adequately address the educational needs of students with disabilities. One tool for planning how to meet these needs is the IEP. Findings from this research indicate that the use of IEPs is limited in the schools that were included in the study. Most parents of students with disabilities reported that their children do not have a formal IEP – or at least they were not aware of one. Despite this, many parents noted that teachers

often make informal accommodations, such as using varied teaching methods and alternative learning materials that better align with their students' needs when possible. Interviews and classroom observations revealed that only a few teachers implement IEPs in their classrooms. Specifically, only 4 out of the 10 classrooms observed in Bagmati reported formal use of IEPs, while none of the teachers in the other provinces reported formal use of IEPs.

When asked about IEP implementation, many teachers expressed a lack of confidence in designing and applying IEPs effectively. Common barriers included limited time for planning, large class sizes and insufficient knowledge about how to develop and tailor IEPs to different types of disabilities. Teachers also highlighted that the training they received on IEPs was insufficient for effective implementation. Many described the training as short in duration, and lacking depth and practical strategies for designing and adapting IEPs to different types of disabilities. Some teachers expressed uncertainty about how to develop IEPs that were truly effective, while others noted that even when an IEP was created, they were unsure how to integrate it into daily classroom activities.

What path should be followed to implement this recommendation?

Action 1: Unify identification and screening efforts by strengthening the Student Assessment Technical Committee (SATC).

Short term: Conduct a comprehensive mapping of existing early screening and identification efforts across provinces and local governments. This mapping should include a review of current protocols, budget allocations and available data. Crucially, it should be organized in three key stages: identification (or pre-screening), screening and medical assessment. Clarifying these distinctions will help define the roles and responsibilities of different personnel involved in each stage. For example, teachers should be trained and supported to carry out pre-screening or initial identification, while screening and medical assessments must be conducted by trained professionals. Coordination with local governments is essential to ensure proper documentation and linkage to services.[28]

The mapping should also assess tools currently in use, such as the Child Functioning Module–Teacher Version developed by the Washington Group and UNICEF. Piloted in Nepal in 2023, the Child Functioning Module–Teacher Version has proven useful for estimating disability prevalence at the population level; but it is not suitable for identifying individual learners or determining the specific support they require.[29,30] Therefore, the review must evaluate the effectiveness of existing screening protocols and consider ongoing government discussions around revising these protocols.

In parallel, budget mapping should analyse how resources are distributed across provinces, identify gaps and promote equitable allocation to ensure that all children are properly screened, identified and supported. Evaluating these elements will help uncover duplication of efforts and highlight opportunities for harmonization. The SATC, under the Ministry of Social Development and Culture, should be positioned as the central body guiding early screening efforts, working in close collaboration with the Disability Coordination Committee to ensure coherence and sustainability.

To ensure that children with disabilities are correctly screened and receive adequate educational services, it is essential to examine not only the screening process itself but also the way in which screening data are introduced and used. Therefore, the short-term plan should also include mapping the way that screening data are currently entered into the IEMIS and exploring opportunities to improve this process – such as by digitizing or systematizing data entry. One promising opportunity is the integration of the Disability Management Information System (DMIS) self-screening app into the IEMIS – as developed by UNICEF, Social Protection Civil Society, and Children-Women in Social Service and Human Rights. At this stage, the focus should be on assessing the best way to integrate this tool, while ensuring data confidentiality and building on existing efforts already under way.

Furthermore, training must be provided at multiple levels to ensure the effective early identification and screening of children with disabilities. This includes targeted training for personnel involved in pre-screening or initial identification, such as teachers and education officials. Such

training should equip teachers with the skills to recognize signs of disability. Training must also be guaranteed for screening personnel, with a review of the existing three-day training package currently being reviewed and updated. This package should be updated to ensure its relevance, depth and practical applicability across different types of disabilities. Additionally, medical professionals involved in medical assessments should receive specialized training, particularly to improve the identification of children with multiple disabilities. Findings from the LiFE research indicate that doctors sometimes face challenges in these cases, which highlights the need for a short, targeted training module that includes guidance on communicating findings effectively to parents. Finally, a brief training module should be developed for data entry personnel responsible for inputting screening results into the IEMIS. This will help ensure data accuracy, consistency and efficiency across the system.

Medium term: Based on the mapping, revise and update the identification and screening guidelines, protocols and budget allocations. The SATC should continue to serve as the central body overseeing these updates, while accountability mechanisms and periodic evaluations are put in place to monitor effectiveness. Protocols should be unified across all local governments to ensure consistency in screening practices nationwide.

Following the short-term assessment of data integration into the IEMIS, the medium-term focus should be on piloting these improvements across selected provinces. This includes ensuring standardized data entry processes and the secure handling of sensitive information. The SATC should also take responsibility for planning support services based on the data collected, ensuring that services are delivered in a timely and responsive manner. Regular assessments of IEMIS data will help identify emerging needs and priorities.

Related training programmes should be developed, or updated, and piloted across different provinces to evaluate their effectiveness. These programmes should be scaled up based on feedback and outcomes from the pilot phase. Finally, based on the mapping of resource gaps, funding should be reallocated or new fundraising initiatives launched

to support screening, diagnosis and service provision. This will ensure that all children receive the support they need in a timely and effective manner.

Long term: Institutionalize the unified identification and screening system nationwide, with the SATC serving as the permanent coordinating body. This includes ensuring accountability and conducting regular assessments to evaluate the system's effectiveness. Accurate data entry into the IEMIS, particularly the DMIS, must be guaranteed to support evidence-based decision-making. Periodic evaluations of training programmes for screening personnel and medical professionals should be conducted to ensure that they remain up to date and effective. Furthermore, it must be ensured that local governments are equipped with the technical and financial capacity to sustain these efforts over time.

Action 2: Establish standardized guidelines to ensure effective implementation of IEPs in full alignment with inclusive education principles.

Short term: Review and revise the existing guidelines for designing and implementing IEPs to ensure that they are standardized, user-friendly and aligned with inclusive education principles. Updated guidelines should incorporate good practices identified in this research and emphasize IEPs as practical tools to support teachers in meeting the diverse needs of students with disabilities. IEPs should be integrated into daily classroom activities and linked to learning outcomes, not used solely for diagnosis. In parallel, develop adaptable templates and accessible guides tailored to different types of disabilities, ensuring usability for teachers with disabilities as well. To support effective implementation, this action must be coordinated with Action 2 of Recommendation 2, which focuses on ensuring the human and material resources needed to apply curriculum accommodations.

Medium term: Pilot the revised IEP guidelines, templates and user-friendly guides to assess their feasibility and effectiveness. Following the pilot, train teachers to implement them effectively. To support this, the existing IEP course within the Teacher Professional

Development (TPD) framework should be updated to align with the revised materials. Importantly, IEP training should be complemented by broader TPD modules that equip teachers with skills in differentiated instruction, enabling them to design and apply IEPs more effectively. These training efforts should be aligned with Action 1 of Recommendation 4, which focuses on strengthening teacher training on inclusive education.

Long term: Institutionalize the reviewed guidelines and templates, and roll them out nationwide. Ensure that they are integrated into teacher training programmes and school planning processes. Establish a monitoring and support system to help schools implement IEPs consistently and effectively. Regularly assess the impact of IEPs on student learning outcomes and update the guidelines accordingly, incorporating feedback from teachers to ensure relevance and practicality.

2. Fully institutionalize Universal Design for Learning (UDL) principles within the national curriculum, alongside a standardized curriculum accommodations framework, to ensure that the diverse needs of all students with disabilities are addressed effectively.

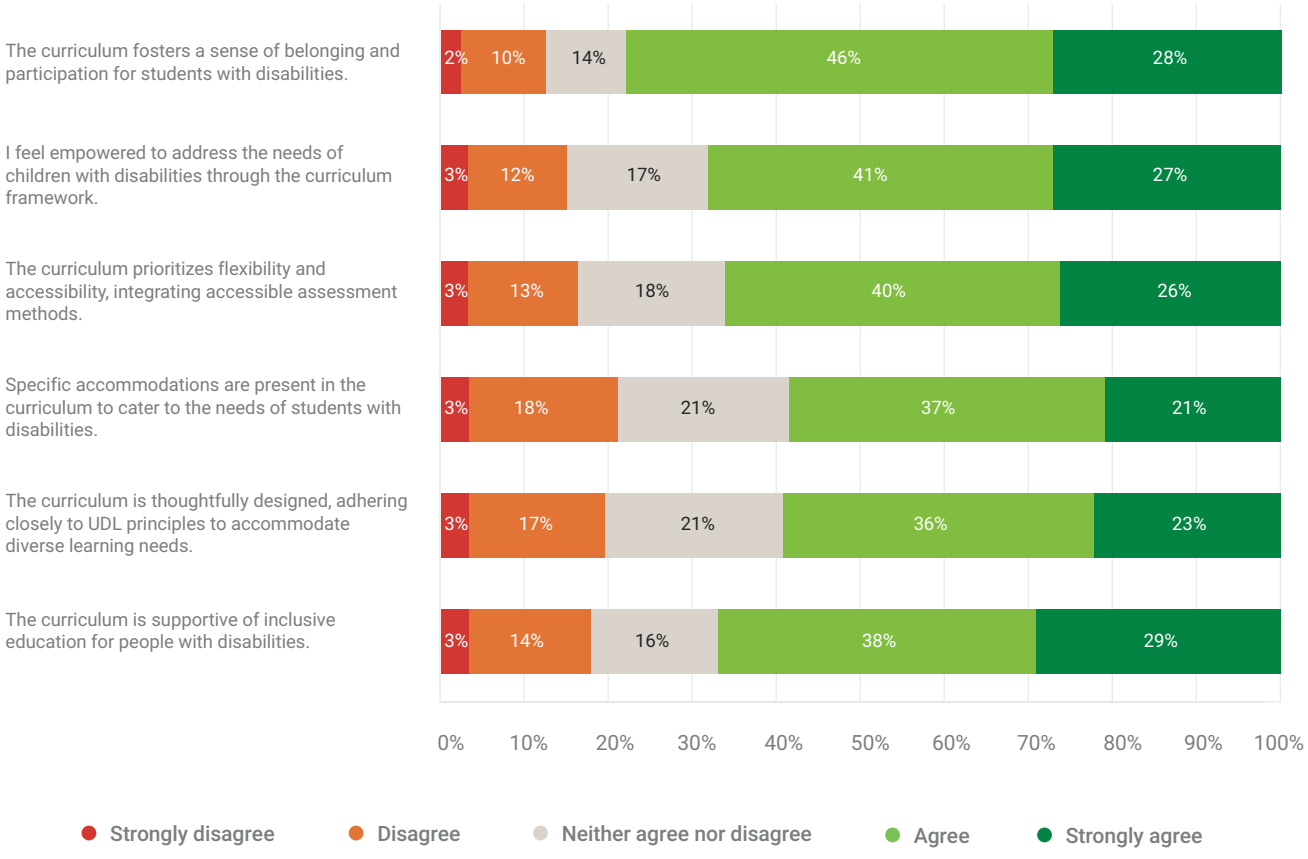
Interviews and classroom observations revealed that many teachers are already applying UDL principles and that training courses on UDL are available. However, these training opportunities remain insufficient and unevenly integrated within the education system. To fully address the needs of students with disabilities, it is essential not only to ensure the effective and consistent implementation of UDL principles, but also to provide curriculum accommodations for students who require them. The findings indicate that the curriculum is flexible enough to meet the needs of students with disabilities and that some teachers are already implementing accommodations- adjustments to teaching methods, materials, and assessments designed to support students with varied learning profiles.[31] Nonetheless, there is a clear need to strengthen resource availability and to develop clear, standardized guidelines that

support all teachers in applying necessary adjustments. Currently, accommodations are often based on individual teachers' experience or discretion, leading to inconsistent implementation across schools. Establishing unified protocols would ensure that all teachers are familiar with appropriate procedures and confident in applying them when needed. This would also help guarantee that accommodations are tailored to the specific needs of learners with different types of disabilities, promoting greater equity and inclusion across the education system.

Which findings support this policy recommendation?

Most surveyed teachers either agree or strongly agree that the current curriculum aligns with disability-inclusive principles (*see Figure 2*).

Figure 2: Teachers' perceptions of the flexibility and inclusivity of the curriculum



N=339

Source: Authors' analysis of survey data

These perceptions are consistent with insights from interviewed participants, who emphasized the existence of a single curriculum for all students, while also highlighting the possibility of designing and applying accommodations tailored to students' individual needs. These accommodations include the use of accessible and specific learning materials, support from specialists, and adapted assessment strategies, which will be discussed further in the next recommendation. In addition to these accommodations, curriculum flexibility was also reflected in the implementation of inclusive teaching methodologies that address the needs of students both with and without disabilities. Teachers and students with and without disabilities noted the use of multiple strategies to ensure comprehension, such as delivering content through various formats (visual aids, tactile materials, videos, oral explanations), verifying understanding through questions and reviews of student work, using real-life examples and concrete materials, repeating content, and adjusting the pace of lessons. Moreover, teachers reported using different types of materials or methods depending on the type of disability (*see Box 3*).

BOX 3

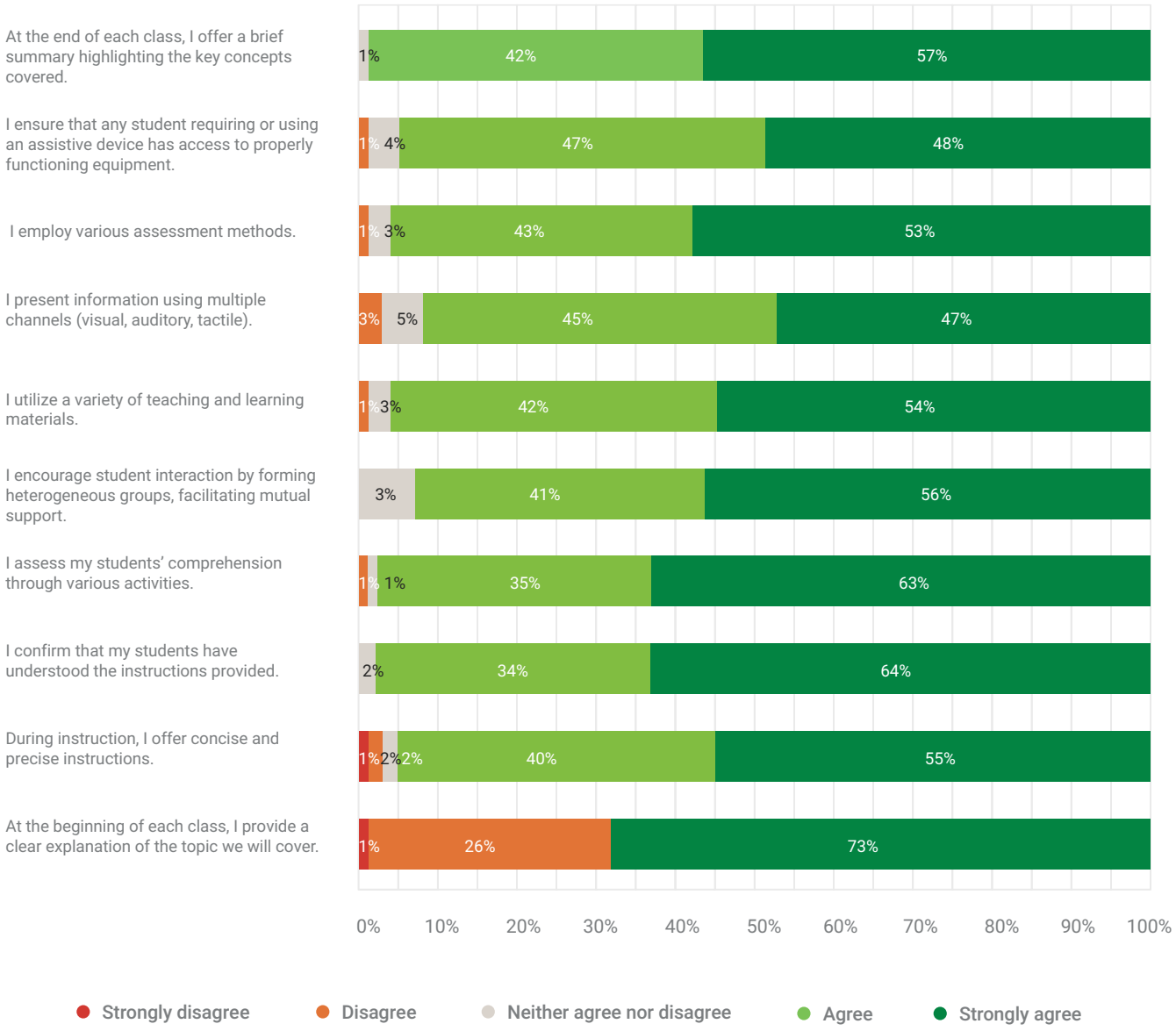
Teaching strategies and materials by type of disability

Interviewed teachers report the use of different types of materials according to the students' needs and disabilities. The most effective ones, according to types of disability, are:

- **Hard of hearing:** Visual aids – such as pictures, tactile materials, loud audio (when partial hearing is present), sign language and writing – are used to support learning.
- **Visual impairment:** Teachers use Braille to teach students with visual impairments. For students with partial sight, teachers ensure the visibility of the board and use tactile materials. Reading aloud and using a question-and-answer approach help engage blind students.
- **Deafblindness:** Tactile methods, including touch and tactile sign language, are the most used methods.
- **Intellectual disability:** Practical, hands-on activities and modelling are cited as the most effective methods for teaching students with intellectual disabilities.

Many of these strategies align with UDL guidelines. For instance, in some cases, teachers began lessons by clearly stating the objectives and daily topics, either verbally or by writing them on the board. Many sessions focused on revision in preparation for upcoming exams, and lesson goals were often communicated to help students stay oriented. Teachers also supported students' preparation by displaying class schedules. Various methods to check understanding were observed, including interactive questioning, quizzes and hands-on class activities. Teachers consistently provided clear instructions and, in many cases, concise questions and directions to ensure that all students, including students with disabilities, could follow along. Additionally, content was delivered using multiple approaches and materials (often incorporating real-life examples to enhance comprehension), emphasized key concepts throughout and concluded with a summary of key takeaways. These practices were corroborated by survey findings, which showed that most surveyed teachers agree or strongly agree that they use teaching methods that align with UDL principles: *see Figure 3*.

Figure 3: UDL guidelines implemented by surveyed teachers



N=339

Source: Authors' analysis of survey data

Accessible teaching and learning materials, along with assistive devices, are essential for implementing necessary accommodations (For more information on good practices on resource provision, *see Box 4*). A notable practice observed was the initiative taken by teachers to design and produce teaching materials using locally available resources – such as pebbles, sticks, bottles, stones, mats and peas – especially in contexts of limited resources. Some materials are ready-made, while others are created by teachers to meet classroom needs. Teachers emphasized the importance of tactile materials for deafblind students and reported a significant lack of such resources, especially for teaching mathematics. Many teachers use stones or sticks to demonstrate shapes and teach geometric concepts. A few teachers reported also involving students (with and without disabilities) in the design of materials as a learning activity. During classroom observations, many of these materials were seen in use, including multisensory tools such as tactile symbols, toys and texture charts, as well as pebbles and sticks for math lessons.

QUOTE

While teaching math in Grade 1, I bring in sticks to use for learning, also different balls, marbles for counting, collecting stones, using picture and word charts. So, besides books, I use various other materials. [...] Yes, and even in Grade 4 science, I collect different types of rocks, like soft and hard rocks, from the surroundings and show them to the students so they understand the differences.

Teacher
Inclusive school, Karnali Province

The production of these materials is largely driven by the lack of accessible resources tailored to the needs of students with disabilities. Interviewed participants reported that the availability of resources varied across schools and depended on the type of resource. Most schools had basic supplies, though some reported shortages of books. Information and communication technology (ICT) tools and flexible learning materials varied; some classrooms had smart-TVs, projectors and computers, while others relied solely on traditional

methods like whiteboards and textbooks. Some schools had tablets or phones provided by external organizations. Teachers noted that while computers and projectors were available in some cases, they were not always trained to use them effectively. Despite these disparities, most teachers interviewed emphasized the usefulness of these tools, particularly the accessible features in computers that support content delivery for hard-of-hearing students and students with visual impairments. Nonetheless, the use of ICT tools was not widely observed during classroom visits. Only about a quarter of the teachers made use of ICT, primarily through smart-TVs or laptops connected to projectors. These tools were mostly used to present visual or audio-visual materials aimed at making lessons more engaging for students. Another challenge reported was the limited availability of Braille books, which are generally accessible for local curriculum subjects from Grades 1 to 8, but not for elective subjects in Grade 12.

The provision of assistive devices also varied. While some institutions were equipped with a range of devices tailored to the needs of their students, others had only a limited selection, and some lacked most of the essential tools altogether. These devices are typically provided by the government or external organizations such as the National Nepal Blind Association, the National Federation of the Disabled Nepal (NFDN) and the Blind Welfare Association. A few teachers mentioned instances of duplicated distribution, raising concerns about coordination among providers.

BOX 4

Teaching strategies and materials by type of disability

- **Provision resources:** Parents from various schools emphasized the critical role of material support in their children's education, as provided by schools, the federal government, local governments and NGOs. The support includes financial assistance, such as exemptions from school and hostel fees, as well as essential supplies like uniforms, stationery, notebooks and other learning materials. Additional support offered at hostels includes health check-ups, food and clothing. Specialized tools – such as books, slates, styluses, white canes and hearing aids – are also provided, primarily through organizations such as the Nepal Blind Association, Blind Welfare Association, Save the Children, the NFDN, Open Learning Exchange Nepal and other NGOs. Parents also highlighted the importance of obtaining a disability card, which enables access to some services and financial support, and they noted that in some cases teachers played a key role in helping them acquire the card.

- **Safeguarding training and resources:** A couple of home-based schools offer safeguarding training for both teachers and parents, to ensure children's safety, backed by appropriate resources and protocols.

- **Training in disability, for parents:** The National Federation of the Disabled Nepal provides disability-related training for both teachers and parents. One school provides sign language training to parents of students with disability.

Beyond accessible teaching materials, the support of specialists is crucial to ensure the learning outcomes for students with disabilities. Only a few teachers and parents reported receiving support from specialists, mainly speech therapists, physiotherapists and sign language interpreters. In some cases, specialists provided direct individual support to students, while in others they collaborated with teachers to support learning. Teachers found this support highly valuable and emphasized the need for more specialists. Some schools had sign language interpreters, but many teachers noted that there were not enough and suggested that teachers should also learn sign language to communicate effectively with students with hearing disabilities. Similarly, some parents reported receiving support from speech therapists, sign language interpreters and physiotherapists

through the school, but many expressed concerns about the limited frequency of these services – typically once or twice per month – and the insufficient number of interpreters. A few parents also expressed interest in receiving training in sign language. Box 5 summarizes standing pedagogical practices, including the support of specialists.

QUOTE

Speech therapy is not enough, but a lot of improvement has been seen. Vast improvement has been seen in the child by once-a-week speech therapy, and if they are provided with regular therapy, it would be a lot more beneficial. Many children who could not use their voice now can speak.

Mother of student with disability
Home-based school, Bagmati province

BOX 5

Good pedagogical practices

- **Sign language interpreters in mainstream classes:** In one school, sign language interpreters support students not only in resource rooms, but also in mainstream classrooms. Beyond interpreting, they offer examples and additional explanations to ensure that all students grasp the lessons fully. They also advocate for simplified phrasing, enabling students who use sign language to respond more confidently.

- **Peer use of sign language:** In another school, sign language teachers model the use of sign language in mainstream classes. As a result, students without disabilities have learned sign language themselves and now use it to communicate directly with their peers.

BOX 5

- **Smooth and systematized transition from resource classrooms to mainstream classrooms:** One school follows clear guidelines for transitioning students from resource classrooms to mainstream classes. They focus on teaching skills that will be useful in mainstream settings, ensuring that students have acquired basic abilities, such as reading and writing, before the move. The process includes gradually increasing the time spent in mainstream classes – starting with one hour, then moving to three hours per day – with support and monitoring from the resource teacher and mainstream class teacher. Students are given an exam, and if they pass, they are moved to the mainstream class. If not, the areas needing improvement are identified and addressed. Students are supported progressively, with the amount of help reducing as they gain autonomy, while still receiving adequate support to learn. Supervision continues after they transition; caretakers (Aaya) assist with tasks like using the toilet, if necessary, and resource teachers check in on their progress.

What path should be followed to implement this recommendation?

Action 1: Fully institutionalize UDL as a system-wide approach in Nepal.

Short term: Conduct a nationwide mapping of both the challenges and the promising practices in implementing UDL, with a focus on teacher training, material accessibility and regional disparities. This process should be led collaboratively by CEHRD, the Curriculum Development Center (CDC), the National Center for Educational Development and provincial education offices – engaging teachers, school leaders, OPDs and NGOs to gather contextual insights and identify scalable entry points for inclusive classroom practices.

Medium term: Systematize the good practices identified and assess their potential to address current gaps. Integrate UDL principles into the TPD framework, in alignment with Action 1 of Recommendation 4, ensuring coherence between inclusive teaching and assessment. CEHRD and the National Center for Educational Development should coordinate equitable distribution of accessible learning resources, guided by the resource allocation strategies outlined in Action 3 of Recommendation 2.

Long term: Institutionalize the identification and documentation of UDL practices as regular functions within national education monitoring and quality assurance systems. Link these efforts with Action 1 of Recommendation 4, to ensure that UDL principles are embedded across instructional and assessment processes. MoEST, CEHRD, CDC and education review units should lead policy integration, supported by teacher unions, academic institutions and OPDs to ensure sustainability and system-wide adoption.

Action 2: Consolidate existing curriculum accommodations into an institutionalized protocol, which effectively addresses the needs of all students with disabilities.

Short term: Document existing curriculum accommodations, with the goal of incorporating them into a comprehensive protocol. This process should include mapping accommodations currently in use, identifying gaps – especially for students with different types of disabilities and across subjects like mathematics, which was highlighted as particularly challenging. In collaboration with CDC, CEHRD and relevant OPDs, design missing accommodations to ensure that all students' needs are addressed. Rather than prescribing a single unified protocol, the framework should offer a menu of accommodation options so that teachers can be trained to engage with them and apply them according to the specific needs of their students and the type of disability. These options must be closely linked to IEPs, supporting teachers in implementing IEPs more effectively. The framework should also be practical and user-friendly, providing clear guidance and examples to help teachers implement it.

Medium term: Pilot the menu of accommodations across diverse provinces to test feasibility and contextual relevance. Train teachers in the protocol, and ensure that both the training content and delivery are sufficient to meet the needs of students with disabilities. This training should be integrated into the broader teacher training package proposed in Action 1 of Recommendation 4.

Long term: Roll out the curriculum accommodations protocol nationwide, making it mandatory for all teachers to be trained in its implementation. Institutionalize the protocol within the national education system to ensure sustainability and consistency in inclusive practices. Once implemented, the framework should be regularly monitored to assess its impact on curriculum delivery and students' learning outcomes. This includes identifying barriers to effective implementation and making necessary adjustments to ensure that the framework remains responsive, practical and inclusive over time.

Action 3: Ensure human and material resources (teaching-learning materials and specialists) for the successful implementation of curriculum accommodations.

Short term: Conduct a comprehensive mapping and diagnosis of existing educational resources and practices. This includes identifying available assistive devices, accessible teaching-learning materials (including accessible ICT resources) and specialists, as well as assessing their current condition, and determining what is still needed. The mapping should examine the collaboration between different frontline agencies – such as those responsible for education, health and social development – to clarify the roles and reach of each stakeholder. This will help to avoid duplication of efforts, reallocating overlapping responsibilities and promoting more efficient and more coordinated service delivery. The mapping should also include ongoing initiatives, such as the development of a sign language dictionary, the production of accessible digital textbooks (ADTs), as currently being piloted in Nepal (e.g., a textbook for Grade 1), and other related efforts. As part of this process, assess the current capacity of government institutions to support inclusive resource development.

Additionally, document good practices in the design of low-cost inclusive materials already implemented by teachers, and map open-access software tools used effectively in Nepal – such as screen readers, motor accessibility tools, speech-to-text software and cognitive accessibility tools. Mapping funding sources will also help identify potential donors and gaps in financing. Importantly, advance efforts to ratify the Marrakesh Treaty to facilitate the production and

exchange of texts in accessible formats. Nepal signed the treaty in 2013, demonstrating its political commitment to removing copyright-related barriers that prevent individuals with visual impairments or print disabilities from accessing published works.[32] Ratifying the treaty would provide a legal foundation to support these efforts and strengthen national policies.

Medium term: Mobilize resources and build capacities to ensure the sustainability of designing and producing accessible teaching-learning materials. Based on the mapping, begin expanding existing resources and designing new ones to address identified gaps, including:

- organizing peer-learning sessions, where experienced teachers train others in designing inclusive materials;
- creating an accessible online repository, listing all resources with clear usage instructions, ensuring accessibility for teachers with disabilities;
- establishing shared resource banks for nearby schools, and deploying itinerant teams of specialists (e.g., sign language interpreters, physiotherapists, speech therapists and psychologists) to provide support as needed; and
- developing transparent guidelines, to ensure the equitable distribution of resources across schools, with attention to rural–urban balance.

To ensure long-term sustainability, strengthen institutional capacity within government bodies – in initiatives like the production of ADTs – by providing technical training and resources that enable the government to design such textbooks from the outset. Ratify the Marrakesh Treaty, and align these efforts by updating copyright legislation and establishing clear protocols for the production and cross-border exchange of accessible formats.

Long term: Institutionalize and scale up the use of inclusive resources and practices nationwide. Formalize peer-learning and training sessions on the design of affordable inclusive teaching-learning materials, and integrate them into national teacher training programmes (aligning this effort with Action 1 of Recommendation 4). Launch and maintain the online repository, ensuring that all teachers are aware of it and can use it effectively. Establish permanent shared resource banks and itinerant specialist teams as part of the national education infrastructure. Integrate the production and acquisition of inclusive materials into school budgets and the national education plan, including dedicated funding for specialists. Ensure that government institutions have the capacity and mandate to lead the ongoing development of ADTs and other accessible materials, making accessibility a standard feature of all future curriculum materials. This will also support full national implementation of the Marrakesh Treaty, enabling Nepal to expand access to published works for persons with print disabilities and promote cross-border exchange of accessible formats.

3. Institutionalize inclusive and flexible assessment guidelines.

Similar to curriculum accommodations, assessment accommodations and modifications are currently applied by teachers according to their own experience and knowledge. To ensure consistency and equity, it is essential to unify assessment accommodations and modifications under a standardized protocol that addresses the needs of learners with different types of disabilities across all grades and subjects. Providing teachers with clear, system-wide guidelines will support the implementation of flexible and inclusive assessment practices. Likewise, ensuring the availability of appropriate resources –such as assistive devices and support from specialists – is key to enabling the effective application of assessment accommodations and modifications.

Which findings support this policy recommendation?

Most interviewed parents of students with disabilities, as well as teachers and students – both with and without disabilities – reported that assessment questions are generally the same for all students. It is worth noting that parents of students with disabilities are often unfamiliar with assessment procedures. Despite the uniformity of exam content, teachers and students with disabilities described the use of both accommodations and modifications, applied according to the type of disability and individual needs.

Accommodations, which involve adjustments to the environment, materials or assessment process, to help students with disabilities access learning without changing the learning goals,[33] were widely reported. Examples included the use of scribes or writers, often selected from peers or staff, to assist students during exams such as the School Education Examination. Students with visual impairments received support through alternative formats: exam questions read aloud; and responses written in Braille and reviewed by resource teachers, or typed on computers to streamline the process and avoid delays caused by translation. Additional accommodations included

separate classrooms, resource teacher assistance during exams, and the provision of extra time – all designed to ensure equitable participation without altering exam content or expectations.

Alongside these measures, teachers also applied modifications, which involve changes to the actual content or to the expectations of what a student is required to learn.[34] These included allowing the substitution of visual description for tasks that required drawings, simplifying exam questions to match individual learning needs, and focusing primarily on content rather than grammatical accuracy for hard-of-hearing students. Such modifications acknowledge communication challenges and adjust performance criteria, ensuring that students are assessed fairly, according to their abilities.

Interviewer: Are your friends with disabilities kept in the same room as you during exams?

QUOTE

Student 2: They have a different room, ma'am.

Student 1: For blind students, the teacher reads the question aloud.

Interviewer: What about the question paper – is it the same for everyone?

Student 3: We have a question paper for deaf students; the teacher uses sign language to explain the questions. For blind students, the teacher reads the questions aloud and they write the answers.

Interviewer: So, it's the same question for everyone?

Student 1: Yes.

Students without disabilities
Inclusive school, Bagmati Province

Despite the implementation of these accommodations, teachers reported challenges in assessing students with disabilities. These challenges are often due to a lack of resources for flexible and accessible assessments, or to uncertainty about how to adapt assessment content – particularly in subjects like mathematics or Nepali.

QUOTE

We discuss these issues more with the principal and teachers than with parents. Since deaf students struggle with sentence structure, we should consider allowing them to write in short and simple phrases. If they answer what is asked in the question, we should accept their response. They should be taught using simple sentences.

Resource teacher
Integrated school with resource classrooms, Bagmati Province

Some teachers explained that besides grading students' performance, they also use qualitative assessment methods. These include evaluating students' progress not only in academic areas but also in daily life skills. Teachers also monitor attendance and participation in extracurricular activities as part of their overall assessment approach. Such comprehensive assessments help students recognize their own achievements and contribute to the strengthening of their social and life skills, which are essential for success in and beyond the classroom.

What path should be followed to implement this recommendation?

Action 1: Institutionalize guidelines on inclusive and flexible assessment accommodations and modifications for all types of disabilities, in all official assessments.

Short term: Map and consolidate the existing assessment accommodations and modifications, applied across the country by type of disability, into a formal guideline, clearly distinguishing between accommodations and modifications. While conducting this mapping – similar to the process used for curriculum accommodations – verify

that accommodations and modifications address the needs of different types of disabilities and subjects (e.g., mathematics, Nepali). Identify any gaps, and – in collaboration with the National Examination Board, Education Review Office, CDC, CEHRD and relevant OPD members – review existing accommodations and modifications, and propose new ones to fill the identified gaps. In parallel, ensure that the human and material resources required to apply these accommodations are available. Coordinate efforts with Action 2 of Recommendation 2, to fully guarantee these resources.

Medium term: Pilot the full set of accommodations and modifications – including existing and newly proposed ones – in different provinces of the country, to ensure their feasibility and relevance. Simultaneously, incorporate this content into pre-service and in-service TPD programmes, to ensure that all teachers and head teachers are familiar with the guidelines and know how to implement them effectively (aligning this effort with Recommendation 4).

Long term: Gradually roll out the inclusive assessment guidelines to schools nationwide, prioritizing those schools with a higher percentage of students with disabilities. Under the lead of the National Examination Board and Education Review Office, institutionalize the guidelines within the national assessment framework, making them mandatory for all official assessments. Eventually, integrate the assessment outcomes into the IEMIS, to support the assessment, monitoring and improvement of inclusive assessment practices.

4. Strengthen the teaching workforce by promoting disability-inclusive training opportunities for teachers and head teachers, and by enhancing the recruitment of teachers with disabilities.

Nepal's government has made progress in disability-inclusive education by developing training courses on key topics such as UDL, IEPs and behavioural management. Despite these advances, findings highlight the need for more continuous, hands-on and in-depth training, which equips teachers with practical tools to support students with

different types of disabilities effectively. Evidence also points to the positive impact of teacher training, showing that teachers' confidence in teaching students with disabilities increases with both experience and targeted training.

Which findings support this policy recommendation?

Only 8 per cent of surveyed teachers and 7 per cent of head teachers mentioned having received training in disability-inclusive education. Most of those had received in-service training (92 per cent).

Some of the interviewed teachers reported having received training in topics such as types of disabilities, IEPs, sign language, strategies for teaching students who are blind, Braille, UDL, curriculum adaptation, behaviour management, and the use of adapted teaching and learning materials. In most interviews, teachers reported that training courses had had a positive impact. Teachers mentioned the ways in which training had helped them to address students' needs more effectively. They specifically stressed how useful courses on behavioural management and UDL were for teaching students with disabilities effectively.

QUOTE

There is definitely a change. After the training – to speak honestly we take one training – and after some time, there's another issue, so we have to learn something else. But yes, it has made things easier. It has become very easy for us to manage behaviour. For example, if there is a crying boy – what is it? Is it problem behaviour or not? Which one should we call a problem behaviour? Antecedents, consequences and functions – we learned about all these, so it became easy for us to address the issue. For example, if a child does not want to engage with us, we identify it as problem behaviour. Then we plan accordingly and move forward.

Teacher
Home-based school, Bagmati Province

While most teachers reported the impact of training courses in disability-inclusive education, they also reported that courses tend to be short, and that training courses for specific subjects or specific knowledge lack an inclusive approach (including inclusive strategies and accommodations according to types of disabilities).

QUOTE

As I don't completely understand their language or how they communicate, or how to teach them, it's difficult. We don't know, we don't have knowledge about this, nor teaching; if there was the training we would try to teach them what we have understand. I learned the language here [sign language]; we kept a teacher and in one month we learned the words.

Teacher
Inclusive school, Lumbini Province

Parents of students with and without disabilities also mentioned how important it is for teachers to be trained in disability-inclusive education, with the need for comprehensive, regular and specialized training. Teachers expressed the need to receive training specific to different types of disabilities, different types of grades and different subjects. Furthermore, they also stressed that it is key for this training to be offered to all teachers despite of the type of contract they have or whether they, themselves, have a disability or not (*see Box 6* for insights on the positive impact of teachers with disabilities). Moreover, teachers underscored the need for training to be updated regularly and to be highly practical, offering hands-on guidance, and providing teachers with concrete strategies and resources to use when teaching.

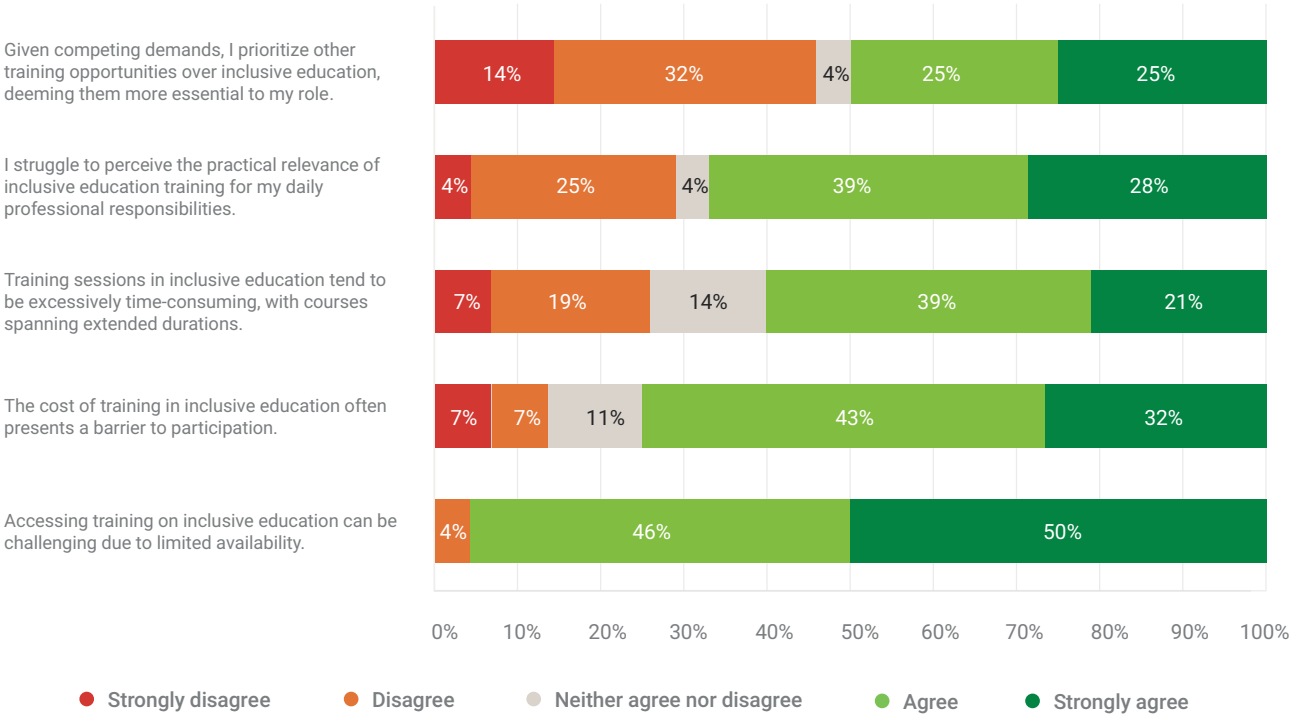
QUOTE

No, we haven't received training specifically for teaching maths to blind students. For example, in a recent maths training session in Kapilvastu, the instructor did not even know Braille. How could we learn from such training? Training opportunities have been very limited. We, the relief teachers, are often left out of teacher training programmes. Only permanent teachers receive training. Despite this, we have continued teaching for years without proper training.

Teacher
Integrated school with resources classrooms, Karnali province

Insights from the teacher survey help to understand better the factors that could increase participation in disability-inclusive education training. Factors include expanding the availability of training options, offering affordable opportunities, and designing training sessions with durations that can be easily balanced with teachers' existing workloads, as seen in *Figure 4*.

Figure 4: Teachers' perceptions of training opportunities



N=339

Source: Authors' analysis of survey data

As expected, teachers with more experience of teaching students with disabilities – particularly those with specialized roles such as resource teachers – reported feeling more confident in supporting learners with diverse needs. Similarly, teachers with disabilities themselves expressed a high level of confidence in teaching students with disabilities, noting that their lived experience gave them a deeper understanding of the challenges and supports required for meaningful participation and learning. However, these teachers also reported facing specific barriers, both during training and in classroom practice. For instance, many noted that the training materials provided were not accessible, limiting their ability to engage fully with the content. In the classroom, the lack of accessible teaching materials and inadequate school infrastructure posed significant challenges, especially for teachers with visual and physical impairments. (See Box 6 for more information about the impact of teachers with disabilities.)

Findings from the research also revealed that head teachers play a crucial role in motivating teachers to pursue training in disability-inclusive education. (For more practices that help raise awareness and positive attitudes towards disability, see Box 6). Teachers and parents alike emphasized how head teachers lead efforts to foster positive attitudes towards disability and inclusive practices within schools. This leadership directly influences the learning outcomes and overall well-being of students with disabilities.

Teachers reported feeling more confident and more supported when implementing new strategies or seeking further training, especially when their head teacher actively supported disability-inclusive education. When head teachers prioritize inclusion, they integrate it into school planning processes. This includes reaching out for support, whether through government programmes or external organizations, to obtain inclusive and accessible teaching-learning materials, cover expenses for students with disabilities, and ensure access to essential services such as the support of specialists.

BOX 6

Good practices to raise awareness of disability and disability-inclusive education

- **Fostering good relationships:** Many schools actively promote friendships between students with and without disabilities. In some schools with resource classrooms, students without disabilities are encouraged to interact and support their peers during recess and class activities. These interactions are reciprocal – students with disabilities also assist their peers – fostering empathy, collaboration and inclusion. Teachers play a key role by organizing mixed-group activities and, in few cases, assigning peer supporters or pairing older students with younger ones with disabilities, to provide assistance.
- **Fostering positive attitudes towards disability and inclusive education:** Some schools reported using explicit strategies to promote disability awareness and inclusion, such as integrating disability topics into lessons and using inclusive examples across subjects. Teachers also described efforts to foster a positive environment among students without disabilities and their families. Importantly, this commitment to inclusion extended beyond resource teachers: most staff actively supported the participation and learning of students with disabilities in all school activities.
- **Impact of teachers with disabilities:** Teachers with disabilities serve as examples and sources of inspiration for both students with and without disabilities. Teachers with disabilities who were interviewed mentioned that their presence in the classroom helps students without disabilities better understand and deconstruct prejudices around disability. In addition, teachers with disabilities, having faced similar challenges to students with disabilities, are more aware of these students' needs and provide support accordingly. They also set high expectations and motivate students to learn and achieve their goals. Students with disabilities often see teachers with disabilities as role models. Many students with disabilities who were interviewed expressed their aspiration to become teachers in the future. Their primary motivations for choosing this career path were to help children like themselves, and to follow in the footsteps of the teachers who supported them in their learning and personal development.
- **Extracurricular activities for students with disabilities:** Students and teachers from various schools reported a range of inclusive extracurricular activities – such as scout teams, clubs, music, dance, sports (including wheelchair and spoon races), quizzes and competitions – adapted to ensure the full participation of students with disabilities. For example, in a school for students who are hard of hearing, teachers used visual cues instead of whistles during races. Some activities, like wheelchair races or a 'smart club' for visually impaired students, are designed specifically for students with disabilities, while others are inclusive of all students. Students with and without disabilities expressed enjoyment of the activities, and teachers noted that these activities boosted confidence and promoted interaction in a fun, inclusive environment.
- **Real-life examples of former students to inspire and show future possibilities:** One school arranges occasional visits from alumni with disabilities who are now working as teachers or at the NFDN. These alumni share the stories of their personal journeys, provide guidance and serve as role models for current students.

Action 1: Ensure comprehensive, periodical, updated, hands-on and specific training in disability-inclusive education for pre-service and in-service teachers.

Short term: Review, unify and update the existing TPD curriculum to ensure that it addresses fully the training needs of teachers in disability-inclusive education. This revision should identify the current courses that already meet the criteria and those that are missing, with a focus on equipping teachers to implement differentiated learning by providing practical, hands-on strategies for teaching students with various types of disabilities. Beyond instructional techniques, it is equally important to include content that fosters positive attitudes towards disability. This includes raising awareness about disability and inclusive education by teaching about the different models of disability, highlighting the benefits of inclusive education for all learners, and creating opportunities for teachers to engage with persons with disabilities and learn from their lived experiences. Upcoming modules – such as the course on teaching mathematics in sign language and the Braille course – should be included in this update. The content must also be adapted to be accessible for teachers with disabilities. Their involvement in reviewing the materials is essential, and, where possible, they should be given opportunities to serve as instructors. Additionally, training should be differentiated: pre-service teachers should receive foundational courses, while in-service teachers should be offered something more akin to refresher training – specialized and in-depth modules that reinforce prior learning and address real-world classroom challenges. A strong emphasis should be placed on pre-service training, to build a solid foundation for disability-inclusive education across the teaching profession.

Medium term: In collaboration with key stakeholders – including the Education Development and Coordination Unit, the MoEST, CEHRD and local governments – budget for, and conduct design of, the missing courses. OPDs should be actively involved, to ensure that the content is appropriately adapted to the needs of students with specific disabilities. Teachers with disabilities should again be included in the development and validation process to ensure the relevance and accessibility of the materials.

Long term: Pilot the new courses and formally embed them into the TPD certification framework. Completion of both pre-service and in-service training in disability-inclusive education should become mandatory for all teachers, regardless of their employment status. This includes resource teachers, relief teachers and other types of teachers.

Action 2: Deliver pre-service and in-service training to strengthen head teachers' leadership in disability-inclusive education.

Short term: Map the promising practices and experiences of head teachers – both with and without disabilities – who have successfully promoted disability-inclusive education in their schools. Systematize and document these practices to identify specific strategies, partnerships and leadership approaches that have fostered inclusive environments. Conduct provincial or municipal collaborative sessions, where head teachers can share their experiences and learn from one another. Use existing platforms, such as regular school meetings conducted across some municipalities, to facilitate these exchanges. Partner with local governments to identify suitable spaces and provide incentives to encourage participation and leadership in promoting disability-inclusive education.

Medium term: Formalize these collaborative sessions into structured training programmes for head teachers. Include not only leadership skills, but also core concepts of disability-inclusive education, practical implementation strategies and guidance on resource mobilization. Promote collaboration across schools, and encourage community engagement to support inclusive initiatives. Ensure that the training is relevant, is capable of being actioned, and is tailored to the challenges that head teachers face in their roles.

Long term: Embed the head-teacher training courses into the TPD framework. Make these courses mandatory, and ensure that they are updated regularly to reflect current practices and real-life experiences.

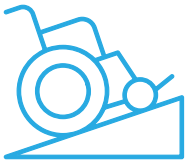
Action 3: Strengthen the recruitment of teachers with disabilities.

Short term: Strengthen inclusive practices in initial teacher training programmes – whether at universities or via other certification pathways – by expanding access, support and leadership for students with disabilities. Financial support, such as scholarships or targeted funding, should be made available to reduce economic barriers. Additionally, institutions must ensure that students with disabilities receive continuous support throughout their academic journey – from the application process to graduation. This includes accommodations during admissions, access to accessible teaching-learning materials and ensuring that the infrastructure is accessible. Programmes that inspire and inform students, such as those initiatives identified in the LiFE research – where former students with disabilities share their success stories with secondary-school students – can also play a vital role. These initiatives should be paired with clear information on enrolment procedures and future career opportunities in teaching.

Medium term: Institutionalize inclusive hiring practices for teachers. One key measure is to reinstate (where absent) or strengthen (where already in place) a minimum 5 per cent quota for persons with disabilities in teaching positions, particularly in mainstream schools. This should be accompanied by targeted outreach and awareness campaigns that promote teaching as a viable and fulfilling career path for persons with disabilities. To support professional growth and retention, schools should also establish mentorship programmes and peer-support networks. These initiatives can help foster a sense of community, reduce isolation and provide practical guidance for navigating the teaching profession.[35]

Long term: Strengthen systems for monitoring, feedback and policy refinement, to promote the recruitment and retention of teachers with disabilities. The MoEST and CEHRD, in collaboration with local governments, should track the recruitment and retention of teachers with disabilities across provinces to assess progress and identify gaps. Establishing feedback mechanisms is also essential, allowing teachers with disabilities to report challenges and suggest improvements in

workplace conditions and support services.[36] Finally, policies must be regularly reviewed and updated, based on evidence and stakeholder input, to ensure that they remain effective and responsive to the evolving needs of teachers with disabilities.



5. Enhance the accessibility of school infrastructure

Nepal's 2013 Accessible Physical Infrastructure and Communication Service Directive for People with Disabilities establishes mandatory standards for ensuring that public buildings and communication services are accessible to persons with disabilities.[37] The policy aims to eliminate physical and informational barriers across sectors such as education, health, transport and other public services, promoting full participation and inclusion. However, despite the clear guidelines outlined in the directive, research findings highlight persistent accessibility challenges in and around schools. The following recommendations focus on improving school accessibility, which is considered a top priority. However, it is important to remember that full accessibility also depends on affordable and accessible transportation. That should be addressed as the next key area of action.

Which findings support this policy recommendation?

Teachers interviewed across various schools reported numerous accessibility challenges affecting students and staff. While many schools have implemented basic accessible features, such as ramps and accessible toilets, provisions nevertheless vary significantly from one school to another. Common issues include limited infrastructure, with classrooms often being small and overcrowded, and accessibility features mostly confined to ground-floor classrooms. This restricts access for students with disabilities to activities held on upper floors. Teachers with disabilities face similar difficulties in navigating school spaces. Students with visual impairments encounter significant challenges when moving around classrooms and school premises, often injuring themselves because of obstacles or poor layout. Likewise, students with physical disabilities struggle to access toilets independently, and they frequently require assistance.

QUOTE

Policies have been introduced to improve inclusive education, but physical infrastructure still needs attention. For example, in our school, most buildings were constructed long ago and lack basic accessibility features. There are no railings, making it unsafe to walk – even with a stick. Inclusive education must include accessible physical structures. Classrooms should also be more technology friendly.

Teacher
Integrated school with resource classrooms, Karnali Province

Parents of students with disabilities echoed these concerns. Many reported needing to be present at school to assist their children, particularly with mobility and toilet access. Students themselves confirmed this, noting that support often came from their mothers or friends. In rare cases, schools provide personal assistants to help with these tasks.

Students with visual impairments corroborated these concerns by describing challenges in navigating school environments, often bumping into obstacles or struggling to find the toilet. Students without disabilities also recognized the importance of accessible infrastructure, observing how their peers face difficulties that can lead to absenteeism or even dropping out. Many reported helping their friends with disabilities move around the school.

QUOTE

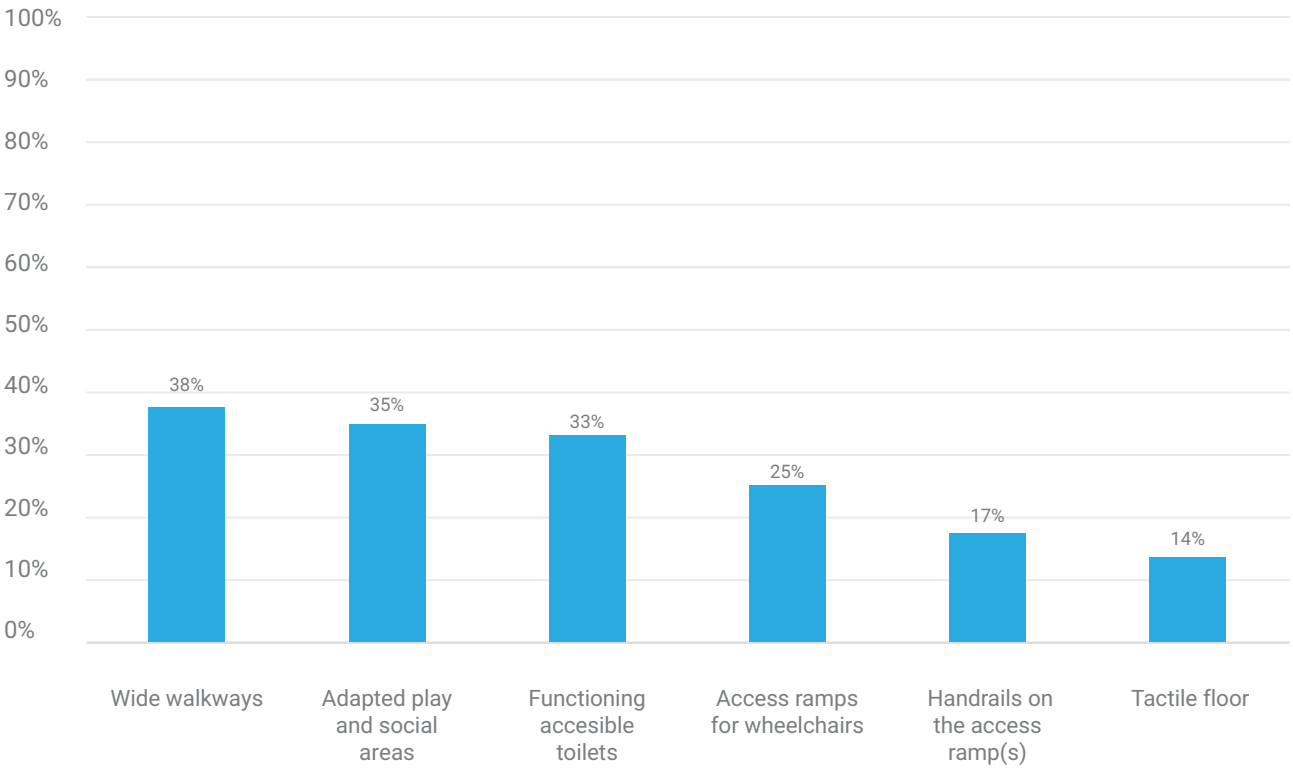
Blind children don't have many games to play. There should be games designed for them. They may not run like other children, but they can participate in other activities. We need more resources and tools to support them.

Mother of student with disability
Inclusive school, Lumbini province

Beyond school infrastructure, transportation emerged as a major barrier. Parents of students with disabilities, as well as students themselves, cited issues such as overcrowded public buses, infrequent school transport and high travel costs – impediments that lead to students eventually dropping out of school or attending inconsistently.

Classroom observations further validated the accessibility challenges reported by teachers, parents and students. Although ramps are available in schools across three of the four provinces in the LiFE research, they are typically restricted to specific areas such as resource rooms or available only for ground-floor access, limiting their overall usefulness. The level of classroom accessibility varies considerably: some classrooms are spacious and equipped with features like tactile pathways, while others are overcrowded and restrict student mobility. Despite these disparities, schools across all four provinces considered in the research generally perform well in certain areas, including reliable electricity connectivity, wide entrances and spacious playgrounds, which contribute positively to the overall learning environment.

Figure 5: School accessibility according to the head teachers surveyed



N=339

Source: Authors' analysis of survey data

What path should be followed to implement this recommendation?

Action 1: Develop an accessibility checklist and update enforcement mechanisms, to ensure accountability and alignment with the standardized accessibility guidelines as outlined in Nepal's 2013 Accessible Physical Infrastructure and Communication Service Directive for People with Disabilities.

Short term: Design an accessibility checklist, specifically for educational institutions, that is aligned with the standards detailed in the current policy and universal design principles. Although the 2013 directive provides comprehensive guidelines based on universal design principles, findings from this research show that implementation in school infrastructure remains limited. The checklist should allow auditors to assess the current state of school facilities and provide actionable feedback on how to improve accessibility. Feedback guidelines and templates should be designed to unify and systematize the recommendations provided. Recommendations should be organized into short-, medium- and long-term actions to help schools prioritize low-cost, immediate solutions.

The checklist should be adapted to all types of educational infrastructure and include a dedicated section for assessing whether learning environments are accessible and inclusive for students with

various types of disabilities. Its development should involve cross-sectoral collaboration with the Ministry of Physical Infrastructure and Transport, engaging local governments, disability experts from OPDs and NGOs, architects, engineers and educators – including teachers and head teachers with disabilities. Donor funding should be mobilized to recruit and train auditors properly, as well as to support the implementation of recommended improvements.

Medium term: Train auditors in how to use the checklist and feedback templates effectively, and establish mechanisms to ensure accountability and quality control. This effort should include hiring qualified auditors and training them with the skills to provide detailed, constructive feedback tailored to educational settings. Monitoring systems should be developed to track implementation and ensure compliance with accessibility standards in schools.

Long term: Pilot the checklist in various provinces and geographical areas to test its feasibility and relevance. Once validated, roll it out nationwide, prioritizing schools with older infrastructure and lower levels of accessibility. Institutionalize the checklist within the national education infrastructure assessment framework, making its use mandatory in all school evaluations. Eventually, integrate the protocol into the IEMIS to support ongoing monitoring, planning and improvement of accessibility in schools across Nepal.

CHAPTER 4

Conclusion

Nepal has made significant strides in advancing disability-inclusive education, through a robust framework of policies, legislative reforms and international commitments. Key milestones include: the ratification of the CRPD; the enactment of the Constitution and the Compulsory and Free Basic Education Act; and the development of strategic plans, such as the School Sector Development Plan and the SESP. These frameworks reflect Nepal's commitment to transitioning from segregated models to inclusive education systems. However, despite these efforts, several challenges persist. These include: fragmented and inconsistent data on disability; the limited institutionalization of inclusive pedagogical approaches, such as UDL; and the lack of systematic curriculum and assessment accommodations. Furthermore, many promising practices remain localized or small-scale, highlighting the need for national-level implementation to ensure consistency and equity across the country.

This report presents a pathway to fulfil five policy recommendations, building on findings from the LiFE research, which identified good practices in disability-inclusive education across the four provinces of Bagmati, Karnali, Koshi and Lumbini. The recommendations are structured around key areas aligned with the SESP's criteria for assessing inclusive schools and government priorities, offering short-, medium- and long-term actions to advance inclusive education nationwide. The identified good practices fall under the following thematic areas: IEP and early screening; curriculum and teaching-learning materials; assessment; teacher training; and physical accessibility. While the benefits of these practices are evident, the findings underscore the need to strengthen the education system to unify and scale up these efforts. The following considerations are essential for applying the five policy recommendations effectively:

- **Inclusive education is a continuous process that benefits all students:** The findings indicate progress in raising awareness and fostering positive attitudes towards disability and inclusive education. However, further efforts are needed to embed inclusion fully across all dimensions of the education system. This includes institutionalizing inclusive practices within teacher training programmes, curriculum development and school-level planning to ensure long-term sustainability.[38]

  Moreover, while most participants clearly recognized the benefits of disability-inclusive education for students with disabilities, the advantages for students without disabilities were less explicitly understood. Interviews with children without disabilities revealed that when teachers apply UDL principles, all learners benefit from the adaptation to their individual paces and learning styles. These students also reported that UDL helps them better understand the material being taught. Additionally, they expressed the view that learning alongside peers with disabilities has helped them become more empathetic, critically aware and resilient. These examples can be used to raise awareness further, with regard to the importance and benefits of disability-inclusive education for all students.

- **Policy and implementation must be aligned:** While Nepal has established strong policy foundations for disability-inclusive education, implementation remains uneven. To bridge this gap, it is essential to establish robust monitoring and accountability mechanisms that ensure transparency, track progress and promote consistency. These mechanisms should help avoid duplication of efforts and ensure that inclusive education is delivered equitably, adapting to the diverse conditions of each province and community. Implementation frameworks must be responsive to local contexts, while maintaining national standards and coherence.[39]

- **Cross-sectoral coordination must be strengthened through clear leadership and alignment across government tiers:** The SESP emphasizes the importance of collaboration across sectors such as: education; health; nutrition; water, sanitation and hygiene; and protection. To operationalize this, the Thematic Working Group on Disability should be designated as the central coordination body, with the authority to define the scope of collaboration and oversee implementation. For each initiative, one lead agency should be assigned, based on the nature of the intervention, and with clearly defined roles for supporting actors. Coordination mechanisms must be aligned vertically across federal, provincial and local governments, beginning with consensus at the federal level and cascading responsibilities downwards. This will help avoid fragmentation and ensure that inclusive education efforts are coherent, efficient and responsive to local needs.[40]

- **Institutional capacity must be strengthened across all levels of government:** The SESP recognizes that the success of inclusive education depends on the capacity of institutions to plan, implement and monitor disability-responsive interventions. A federal-level capacity-building framework should be developed, including standardized training modules, technical guidelines and implementation tools. Provincial and local governments must receive tailored training and support to apply these frameworks

effectively. This includes designing and delivering accessible teaching and learning materials, implementing early identification and referral systems, and training teachers and education officials in inclusive pedagogies and disability rights. Capacity-building efforts must be aligned across all tiers of government to ensure consistency and equity, and local governments must be adequately resourced to fulfil their responsibilities.[41]

- **Adequate funding allocation is critical:** Ensuring adequate and aligned budgeting for disability-inclusive education is essential to realizing the commitments outlined in Nepal's SESP 2022/23–2030/31. While the plan includes strategic actions such as scholarships, inclusive infrastructure, teacher training and adapted learning materials, the budget allocations for these actions are not always clearly defined or sufficient. In several cases, it remains unclear whether the proposed activities are fully funded or the resources equitably distributed across federal, provincial and local levels. To address this, it is critical that the Government of Nepal guarantees dedicated and adequate budget allocations for all disability-inclusive education actions outlined in the SESP, ensuring that funding is not only planned, but also secured, tracked and transparently reported. Budgeting and implementation must be aligned across all three tiers of government to harmonize efforts and avoid fragmentation. Furthermore, given the cross-sectoral nature of inclusive education – which depends on integrated services such as assistive technologies, early screenings and accessible infrastructure – it is recommended that joint planning and budgeting be promoted across sectors including education, health, infrastructure and social protection. This will ensure that inclusive education is not only a policy priority, but also a fully resourced and sustainably implemented reality.[42]

- **International commitments must be fulfilled**: Nepal signed the CRPD in 2008 and ratified it in 2009.[43] Additionally, Nepal signed the Marrakesh Treaty in 2013.[44] While the Inclusive Education Policy for persons with disabilities (2017)[45] broadly aligns with the CRPD, gaps remain – particularly in the explicit promotion of UDL and the provision of reasonable accommodations. Addressing these gaps would strengthen the alignment between national frameworks and international obligations. Furthermore, ratifying the Marrakesh Treaty would enhance Nepal's ability to produce and distribute accessible learning materials. To fully realize the treaty's potential, it will be necessary to update copyright legislation and establish clear protocols for the production and cross-border exchange of accessible formats.

This report and the considerations mentioned above offer a roadmap for policymakers and development partners to strengthen Nepal's inclusive education system. By building on existing good practices and by addressing systemic gaps, Nepal's education system can be strengthened further, to ensure quality education for all students.

Annexes

Annex A: Qualitative research sample

A total of 20 schools participated in the qualitative data collection. These included inclusive schools, special schools, integrated schools with resource classrooms and homes-based schools in both rural and urban areas of the Bagmati, Lumbini, Karnali and Koshi provinces. In each school, teachers and students with disabilities were interviewed. For parents of students with and without disabilities, and students without disabilities themselves focus group discussions (FGDs) were conducted instead of individual interviews. Each FGD consisted of 5 to 7 participants.

An effort was made to ensure equal representation in terms of gender and type of disability among the students included in the study. Table A.1 shows a detailed breakdown of the number and type of participants across the different provinces and type of schools.

Table A1: School-based sample in Nampula, Gaza and Sofala

KEY INFORMANT	DATA COLLECTION MODE	NUMBER OF SCHOOLS	APPROXIMATE NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS PER SCHOOL	APPROXIMATE NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS IN TOTAL
Teachers, students with and without disabilities	Classroom observation	20 (5 per province)	(1 classroom for pre-primary and 1 for primary per school)	35 classrooms
Students with disabilities	In-depth interview	20 (5 per province)	2	35
Parents of students with disabilities	Focus group discussion (FGD)	20 (5 per province)	1 FGD (5 participants)	100
Students without disabilities	FGD	20 (5 per province)	1 FGD (5 participants)	100
Parents of students without disabilities	FGD	20 (5 per province)	1 FGD (5 participants)	100
Teachers	In-depth interview	20 (5 per province)	2	40
			TOTAL	**375**

Source: Author's analysis of qualitative data

Annex B: Quantitative research sample

Tables B.1, B.2 and B.3 contain a summary of the sociodemographic data for the participants in the online surveys. These data include sociodemographic information and education-related characteristics of head teachers and teachers.

Table B1: Sociodemographic data of district officials, head teachers and teachers

PARTICIPANT	NUMBER	GENDER			AREA	
		Female	Male	Other	Rural	Urban
Head teachers	**191**	22%	78%	0%	85%	15%
Teachers	**339**	34%	66%	0%	70%	30%

Table B2: Teacher education-related characteristics

SCHOOL TYPE		TEACHER TYPE		EXPERIENCE TEACHING	
Special school	3%	**Civil servant**	59%	**0–2 years**	20%
Integrated school with resource classrooms	44%	**Temporary contract**	14%	**3–5 years**	13%
Inclusive school	52%	**Relief teacher (temporary position funded by the local government)**	17%	**6–9 years**	17%
Non-formal education	1%	**Private contract**	10%	**10–15 years**	14%
				15+ years	**36%**

Table B3: Head teacher education-related characteristics

SCHOOL LEVEL		HIGHEST ACADEMIC QUALIFICATION		EXPERIENCE AS HEAD TEACHER	
Special school	6%	**High school diploma**	23%	**0–2 years**	45%
Integrated school with resource classrooms	42%	**Undergraduate**	31%	**3–5 years**	19%
Inclusive school	50%	**Master's degree**	43%	**6–9 years**	15%
Non-formal education	2%	**PhD**	1%	**10–15 years**	14%
		Other	2%	**15+ years**	7%

Source: Author's analysis of survey data

Annex C: Education Scalability Checklist outcomes

The Education Scalability Checklist (ESC) tool was used to assess how difficult, or easy, it is to scale up identified good practices on disability-inclusive education and develop an action plan for scaling up. The ESC was used during the third and final workshop conducted as part of the research. The key stakeholders who used the ESC included CEHRD officials, MoEST officials, OPDs, NGOs, members of international organizations and academics experts on the topic. Before its implementation, a member from UNICEF Innocenti presented and explained the purpose and use of the tool. In addition, workshop participants were provided with an infographic that summarized the purpose of, and method of using, this tool, not only for this specific project but also to build capacity among stakeholders for applying the ESC tool to any education initiative. The ESC tool was used to assess two identified types of good practice: inclusive assessment practices and structured guidelines to implement an IEP. These two practices were selected – from among all the good practices identified by the workshop participants – as being the most feasible and urgent practices to be scaled up. Given that participants were trained in the use the ESC tool, it was agreed to use the tool to assess the scalability of the other good practices, as needed, and in alignment with government priorities.

Scaling-up action plans:

- **Inclusive assessment**

The CDC will lead the initial stages, beginning with a workshop that brings together like-minded organizations and individuals to map existing inclusive assessment systems and set future directions. Following this, a task group will be formed to revise, update and research current practices. The CDC will then develop a disability-inclusive assessment framework, with plans to introduce related materials by June 2026. This framework will undergo piloting, followed by feedback and validation workshops to ensure its relevance and effectiveness.

Once validated, the integration of inclusive assessment practices into the IEMIS will be led by CEHRD. To support implementation at the local level, capacity-building activities will be carried out for local governments, with contributions from the CDC and provincial governments. Local governments, with support from CEHRD and the National Examinations Board, will also be responsible for training school teachers and head teachers. Finally, the National Examinations Board will oversee the administration of the inclusive assessment system, ensuring its operationalization across schools.

- **Structured guidelines to design and implement an IEP**

The plan begins with the integration of IEP-related activities into local programmes and budgets, ensuring that sufficient financial resources are allocated to support inclusive education efforts. Capacity building for teachers and head teachers is a central component, with targeted training designed to strengthen their ability to develop and implement effective IEPs.

To reinforce these efforts, follow-up support and onsite monitoring will be provided, enabling educators to receive timely guidance and feedback. Additionally, need-based materials will be distributed to schools, to support the practical application of IEPs. Monitoring, evaluation and learning mechanisms will be established to track progress, identify challenges and inform continuous improvement.

Local governments will be made more accountable through capacity enhancement and dedicated budgetary provisions. Coordination and collaboration with like-minded institutions – including all three tiers of government, OPDs and community-based organizations – will be prioritized, to ensure a unified approach. Opportunities for learning and sharing will be facilitated through technical working groups and other platforms, promoting the exchange of experiences and innovations.

Finally, advocacy and sensitization efforts will be carried out to build broader stakeholder support, with active involvement from local governments, provincial authorities and CEHRD.

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