

## Conceptualising A Multidisciplinary Support System for Children with Special Needs (CWSN) In School Settings

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### ABSTRACT

Children With Special Needs (CWSN) are an integral part of every school community, yet they often remain underserved in educational systems that prioritize uniformity over diversity. While inclusive education has gained policy recognition, particularly through India's National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, real inclusion requires more than placing CWSN in regular classrooms it demands the creation of environments that are responsive to their academic, emotional, social, and psychological needs. NEP 2020 envisions equitable learning spaces where all children can thrive, but the realization of this vision depends on practical, school-level systems of care. This paper conceptualizes a multidisciplinary support system tailored to the needs of CWSN within mainstream school settings. It draws on developmental and educational psychology, along with social-ecological theories, to propose a framework that brings together educators, psychologists, special educators, therapists, and families in a collaborative model of support. The discussion emphasizes the need for personalized, child-centered interventions, rooted in empathy, flexibility, and professional collaboration. Two original tables are included to illustrate the roles of stakeholders and outline steps for effective implementation. By connecting theory, policy, and practice, this paper aims to contribute a thoughtful and actionable model for creating inclusive school environments where every child, regardless of ability, feels supported, valued, and capable of success.

**Keywords:** *Children With Special Needs (CWSN), Inclusive Education, Multidisciplinary Support, NEP 2020*

Inclusive education represents not just a pedagogical strategy but a commitment to equity, where every child, regardless of ability or background, is given the opportunity to learn and grow in a shared environment. For Children With Special Needs (CWSN), inclusion means more than physical placement in a mainstream classroom it requires tailored support systems that consider the cognitive, emotional, behavioral, and social complexities of each child. These needs, when unmet, can lead to academic underachievement, social exclusion, and psychological distress (Sharma & Das, 2015). As schools in India and globally move toward greater inclusivity, the role of school-based support systems has become increasingly important in shaping successful outcomes for CWSN.

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The **National Education Policy (NEP) 2020** is a significant milestone in India's educational landscape, as it explicitly advocates for the inclusion of all learners, including those with special needs, within mainstream schools. NEP 2020 emphasizes early identification, individualized support, and the use of technology and trained professionals to ensure that learning is accessible and equitable for all. However, the implementation of this vision remains uneven due to structural, financial, and human resource constraints. There is a pressing need for a **multidisciplinary support system** a collaborative framework where educators, psychologists, special educators, speech and occupational therapists, and families work together to support the diverse needs of CWSN (Rao & Mehta, 2020). Such a system aligns with the ecological perspective that a child's development is influenced by multiple interconnected environments (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

The need for a multidisciplinary approach is supported by research that highlights the effectiveness of integrated services in improving outcomes for children with developmental and learning challenges. For example, Lindsay et al. (2013) found that coordinated efforts between teachers, therapists, and families led to improved academic and behavioral performance in students with special needs. Similarly, Florian and Black-Hawkins (2011) argued that inclusion is most successful when it moves beyond access to learning and focuses on participation, achievement, and the valuing of diversity. These findings underline the importance of conceptualizing a school support system that is proactive, flexible, and grounded in collaboration across disciplines.

This paper presents a conceptual and theoretical framework for establishing a multidisciplinary support system for CWSN in school settings, grounded in both psychological theory and national policy imperatives. By synthesizing insights from inclusive education research, developmental psychology, and NEP 2020, the paper aims to propose a model that is both practical and aspirational. Through the integration of two original tables, the roles of key stakeholders and the implementation process are mapped out clearly, offering guidance for educators, policymakers, and mental health professionals. The ultimate goal is to envision a system where schools do not merely accommodate difference but embrace it, ensuring that every child, regardless of ability, receives the support they need to flourish.

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Inclusive education for Children With Special Needs (CWSN) has gained significant attention over the past decades, with numerous studies emphasizing the need for a multidisciplinary approach to meet diverse learning and developmental needs. For instance, Sharma, Loreman, and Forlin (2019) highlighted that collaborative efforts among teachers, special educators, and therapists are crucial for creating effective inclusive classrooms. Similarly, D'Alessio and Banerjee (2020) found that schools with structured multidisciplinary teams report better academic and psychosocial outcomes for CWSN compared to schools without such frameworks. These findings underscore the necessity of integrating various professional perspectives to provide holistic support.

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 reinforces this view by advocating early identification and intervention through coordinated efforts (Ministry of Education, 2020). This policy emphasis aligns with earlier work by Mukhopadhyay and Mani (2019), who demonstrated that early screening and collaborative intervention significantly improve long-term educational outcomes for children with disabilities. Moreover, psychological research

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supports the involvement of mental health professionals in the multidisciplinary team. For example, Cohen and Kaufman (2018) emphasized the critical role of school psychologists in assessing emotional and behavioral needs, which directly impact learning.

Parental involvement is another essential dimension identified in the literature. Epstein (2018) asserted that active family participation enhances the effectiveness of support services and contributes to the child's sense of security and motivation. Studies by Sharma and Desai (2021) further revealed that sustained communication between school professionals and families fosters consistency in interventions across school and home environments. This collaborative culture not only benefits children but also promotes a more inclusive school climate.

Finally, research exploring barriers to effective multidisciplinary support highlights challenges such as lack of training, inadequate resources, and limited interprofessional communication. According to Bhattacharya and Ghosh (2020), many schools struggle with insufficient specialist staff and unclear role definitions, which hinder collaboration. Similarly, Singh, Kumar, and Gupta (2022) noted that despite policy mandates like NEP 2020, practical implementation remains inconsistent due to systemic issues. Addressing these barriers is essential for realizing the full potential of multidisciplinary support systems in schools.

### ***Significance of the Study***

The education of Children With Special Needs (CWSN) is not only a matter of legal compliance or policy rhetoric; it is a crucial step toward building a just and equitable society. Despite the increasing emphasis on inclusion worldwide and particularly within India's National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, many schools still struggle to provide adequate support to these children. The significance of this study lies in its attempt to bridge the gap between policy aspirations and on-the-ground realities by conceptualizing a comprehensive, multidisciplinary support system tailored for schools. Such a system can transform schools from mere places of academic instruction into nurturing environments where every child's unique needs are recognized and met.

This study highlights the importance of coordinated efforts among different professionals teachers, special educators, psychologists, therapists, counselors, and parents to create a holistic support network. The benefits of such collaboration go beyond improved academic performance; they contribute to better emotional well-being, enhanced social skills, and increased self-confidence in CWSN. By focusing on the psychological and social dimensions of learning, this study acknowledges that supporting CWSN requires more than academic accommodations; it demands attention to their overall development.

Furthermore, the study's alignment with NEP 2020 is especially timely and relevant. The policy sets ambitious goals for inclusive education, but it offers limited practical guidance on how schools can operationalize these goals effectively. By offering a conceptual framework grounded in psychological theories and multidisciplinary collaboration, this study provides actionable insights that can help educators, administrators, and policymakers make inclusion more meaningful and sustainable. This is critical not only for CWSN but also for creating a school culture that values diversity and fosters empathy among all students.

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Finally, the multidisciplinary support system proposed in this study can serve as a model for future research and practice in other regions and educational contexts. As global conversations on inclusion evolve, there is a pressing need for adaptable frameworks that respond to local challenges while embracing universal principles of equity and respect. By contributing a clear, descriptive, and theoretically informed model, this study hopes to inspire meaningful change in how schools support children with diverse learning needs.

### *Objectives*

- To conceptualize a multidisciplinary support system that addresses the diverse academic, psychological, and social needs of Children With Special Needs (CWSN) within mainstream school settings.
- To explore the roles and collaborative efforts of educators, mental health professionals, therapists, families, and administrators in creating an inclusive and supportive school environment.
- To align the proposed support framework with the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, emphasizing early identification, personalized intervention, and equity in education.
- To identify key processes and strategies necessary for effective implementation, monitoring, and continuous improvement of support services for CWSN.
- To provide recommendations that can guide policymakers, educators, and practitioners in establishing sustainable multidisciplinary support systems in schools.

## **METHODOLOGY**

This study adopts a conceptual and theoretical approach by systematically reviewing and synthesizing relevant literature, policy documents, and psychological theories that inform inclusive education and multidisciplinary support for Children With Special Needs (CWSN). Primary emphasis is placed on analyzing key educational frameworks, notably the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, alongside established developmental and learning theories such as Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory and Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory. Through critical examination of these sources, the study constructs a cohesive and practical model that highlights the roles of diverse stakeholders, processes, and collaborative strategies necessary for effective support within school settings. As a non-empirical investigation, it relies entirely on secondary data to ground its framework in both theoretical rigor and current policy priorities, aiming to provide actionable insights for educators, administrators, and mental health professionals dedicated to advancing inclusive education.

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

The development of an effective multidisciplinary support system for Children With Special Needs (CWSN) in schools requires a strong theoretical foundation that explains how children grow and learn within their environments. Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory provides a comprehensive lens for understanding the multiple layers of influence on a child's development, ranging from immediate family and school environments to broader societal and policy contexts. According to Bronfenbrenner (1979), these interconnected systems interact dynamically, and support for CWSN must therefore involve collaboration among individuals and institutions across these layers.

Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory further underscores the role of social interaction and cultural tools in a child's cognitive development. It highlights the importance of guided

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learning through more knowledgeable others such as teachers, therapists, and family members who scaffold a child's progress according to their Zone of Proximal Development. Applying this theory, a multidisciplinary support system can be seen as a structured network of collaborators who provide tailored support that promotes the child's learning potential while respecting their individual pace and style.

Together, these theories support the idea that addressing the needs of CWSN requires more than isolated interventions; it demands a coordinated, flexible, and holistic system of care. The multidisciplinary model proposed in this paper draws from these theoretical perspectives to advocate for a support system where multiple professionals collaborate closely within the school setting, guided by the vision and mandates of policies such as India's National Education Policy (NEP) 2020.

**Table 1: Key Stakeholders and Their Roles in the Multidisciplinary Support System for CWSN**

<b>STAKEHOLDER</b>	<b>PRIMARY ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES</b>
<b>Classroom Teacher</b>	Implements inclusive teaching strategies; monitors academic progress; collaborates with specialists; adapts curriculum.
<b>Special Educator</b>	Provides specialized instruction and intervention; develops Individualized Education Plans (IEPs); supports teacher training.
<b>School Psychologist</b>	Conducts assessments; addresses emotional and behavioral challenges; provides counseling and psychological support.
<b>Speech Therapist</b>	Assesses and treats speech and communication difficulties; collaborates with teachers and parents.
<b>Occupational Therapist</b>	Supports fine motor skills and daily living activities; recommends classroom accommodations; assists with sensory integration.
<b>School Counselor</b>	Offers social-emotional support; facilitates peer relationships; guides career and academic counseling.
<b>Parents/Families</b>	Provide insights about child's needs; reinforce learning and interventions at home; participate in planning and feedback.
<b>School Administrator</b>	Ensures resource allocation; promotes inclusive policies; facilitates coordination among team members.
<b>Community Professionals</b>	Offers additional resources and services (e.g., medical, social work); supports transitions and external referrals.

### **Conceptual Analysis**

Building on the theoretical foundations, this section conceptualizes a multidisciplinary support system designed to meet the complex and varied needs of Children With Special Needs (CWSN) in school environments. The system emphasizes the importance of collaboration among educators, special educators, psychologists, therapists, counselors, parents, and administrators to create a nurturing and inclusive space where every child can flourish.

The model highlights key components such as early identification, individualized planning, coordinated intervention, continuous monitoring, and regular review. Each step involves specific stakeholders working in unison to ensure that the support provided is comprehensive and tailored to the child's evolving needs. This dynamic process allows the system to be flexible and responsive, preventing children from falling through gaps in care.

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Aligned with the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, this framework prioritizes equity, accessibility, and personalized learning opportunities. NEP's focus on inclusion, early assessment, and multidisciplinary collaboration forms the backbone of this conceptual model, advocating that schools become centers of holistic development rather than mere academic instruction.

Table 2 below illustrates the structure and flow of the support system, detailing the roles of various stakeholders at each stage from identification to intervention and review highlighting how ongoing communication and collaboration strengthen outcomes for CWSN.

**Table 2: Structural Components and Process Flow of the Multidisciplinary Support System for CWSN**

Stage	Description	Key Stakeholders Involved	Purpose/Outcome
<b>Identification</b>	Early detection of special needs through observations, screenings, and referrals.	Teachers, School Psychologists, Parents, Special Educators	Timely recognition of learning or developmental challenges.
<b>Assessment</b>	Comprehensive evaluation of the child's academic, psychological, and social needs.	School Psychologists, Special Educators, Therapists	Detailed understanding of strengths, needs, and challenges.
<b>Planning</b>	Development of an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) or support plan tailored to the child.	Multidisciplinary Team, Parents, School Administrators	Clear, customized strategies and goals to guide interventions.
<b>Intervention</b>	Implementation of targeted teaching methods, therapies, counseling, and accommodations.	Classroom Teachers, Special Educators, Therapists, Counselors	Delivery of personalized support to enhance learning and well-being.
<b>Monitoring</b>	Regular tracking of progress through observations, assessments, and feedback.	Teachers, Special Educators, Psychologists, Parents	Ensuring the effectiveness of interventions and making necessary adjustments.
<b>Review &amp; Feedback</b>	Periodic review meetings to evaluate progress and revise plans as needed.	Entire Multidisciplinary Team, Parents	Continuous improvement of support strategies and child outcomes.

### RESULTS AND FINDINGS

The conceptual exploration of a multidisciplinary support system for Children With Special Needs (CWSN) in school settings reveals several critical outcomes. First, the integration of

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diverse professionals—such as special educators, psychologists, therapists, counselors, and family members—creates a more holistic support environment that addresses the multiple dimensions of a child’s development. This collaborative approach fosters better identification of needs and more targeted interventions, which literature consistently associates with improved educational and psychosocial outcomes for CWSN.

Second, the alignment with the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 reinforces the practical applicability of the framework. The policy’s focus on early screening, inclusive pedagogy, and personalized learning supports the implementation of coordinated support systems in schools. Findings suggest that when schools adopt such multidisciplinary models, they become better equipped to provide equitable and effective education, reducing the risk of marginalization for children with special needs.

Lastly, the study identifies that continuous communication and feedback loops among all stakeholders are fundamental for maintaining the responsiveness and flexibility of the support system. Ongoing monitoring and regular review of intervention plans ensure that support remains aligned with the child’s changing needs, promoting sustained progress. These findings emphasize that a dynamic and collaborative model is essential for successful inclusion, not only as a theoretical ideal but as a practical reality in diverse school contexts.

### **DISCUSSION**

The proposed multidisciplinary support system offers a comprehensive framework that responds effectively to the diverse and complex needs of Children With Special Needs (CWSN) within mainstream school settings. By integrating the expertise of educators, psychologists, therapists, counselors, and families, this model ensures that interventions are holistic, addressing academic challenges alongside emotional, social, and developmental needs. Such collaboration fosters an inclusive environment where CWSN can thrive, benefiting not only from specialized support but also from the shared responsibility and communication among stakeholders. This approach reflects current psychological understanding that children’s learning and development are influenced by multiple interacting systems, making coordinated efforts essential for meaningful progress.

The alignment of this framework with India’s National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 further strengthens its relevance and applicability. NEP 2020 emphasizes early identification, personalized learning pathways, and equitable access to quality education for all learners, including those with special needs. The support system outlined in this paper operationalizes these principles by promoting timely assessments, tailored interventions, and continuous monitoring through a collaborative team. By doing so, it addresses critical gaps that often hinder effective inclusion, such as fragmented services and inconsistent communication. This alignment not only facilitates policy compliance but also encourages schools to evolve into inclusive spaces that respect and nurture diversity.

Despite its strengths, the successful implementation of this multidisciplinary system faces practical challenges. Issues such as insufficient training for school personnel, limited resources, and unclear role definitions can impede collaboration and reduce the effectiveness of support services. Furthermore, cultural attitudes and systemic barriers may affect family engagement and acceptance of interventions. Recognizing these obstacles is crucial, as it highlights the need for ongoing capacity building, resource allocation, and awareness

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programs. Addressing these challenges head-on will be vital to translating the conceptual framework into sustainable practices that truly enhance educational outcomes for CWSN.

### ***Challenges and Barriers***

Implementing a multidisciplinary support system for Children With Special Needs (CWSN) in school settings faces several critical challenges that can hinder its effectiveness. One major barrier is the lack of adequate training and awareness among school personnel, including teachers, counselors, and administrators. Many professionals are not fully prepared to collaborate across disciplines or to address the complex and varied needs of CWSN, resulting in fragmented and inconsistent support. Additionally, resource limitations such as insufficient staffing, lack of specialized professionals, and inadequate infrastructure further constrain the ability of schools to provide comprehensive, individualized interventions. These shortages are especially pronounced in under-resourced or rural schools, where access to allied health services like speech therapy, occupational therapy, or psychological counseling is often minimal or nonexistent.

Beyond logistical issues, systemic and cultural obstacles also play a significant role in impeding the successful implementation of multidisciplinary approaches. Ambiguities in roles and responsibilities among team members can cause confusion and reduce collaboration efficiency. Communication gaps and hierarchical attitudes between professionals may lead to misunderstandings and delayed decision-making. Moreover, societal stigma and low levels of awareness about special needs within school communities and families can affect engagement and acceptance of support programs. These factors limit meaningful participation and undermine efforts to build inclusive environments. Overcoming these challenges requires focused investment in capacity building, policy enforcement, resource allocation, and ongoing sensitization efforts to foster a culture of collaboration and inclusion.

### ***Educational Implications***

The conceptualization of a multidisciplinary support system for Children With Special Needs (CWSN) holds profound implications for educational practice and policy. It underscores the importance of adopting an inclusive framework where collaboration among educators, specialists, families, and policymakers becomes central to fostering equitable learning opportunities. This approach encourages schools to move beyond traditional, isolated interventions and instead embrace holistic strategies that address academic, emotional, and social development simultaneously. By integrating psychological theories with policy mandates like NEP 2020, the support system promotes early identification and personalized learning pathways, which can enhance engagement and academic success for CWSN. Ultimately, such an inclusive model not only benefits children with special needs but also enriches the overall school environment by fostering empathy, diversity, and mutual respect.

### ***Recommendations***

To effectively implement the multidisciplinary support system, schools must prioritize comprehensive professional development programs that equip educators and allied professionals with the necessary skills and knowledge. Training should focus not only on special education techniques but also on collaborative practices, cultural competence, and the use of evidence-based interventions. Continuous capacity-building initiatives will empower school teams to work cohesively, enabling timely and targeted support for CWSN.

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Moreover, incorporating mental health awareness and inclusive pedagogy into teacher education curricula can lay a strong foundation for sustained inclusive practices.

In addition to training, adequate resource allocation is critical for sustaining multidisciplinary support systems. Policymakers and educational authorities should ensure that schools have access to sufficient specialist staff—including psychologists, speech therapists, occupational therapists, and counselors—alongside appropriate infrastructure and learning materials. Funding models should account for the extra needs of inclusive education and enable flexible resource distribution based on specific school contexts. Strengthening partnerships with community organizations and health services can also expand the range of support available to children and families.

Finally, fostering a culture of collaboration and awareness within schools and communities is essential. Schools should actively engage families as partners in the support process, promoting transparent communication and shared decision-making. Awareness campaigns and sensitization programs can help reduce stigma surrounding special needs and encourage acceptance of diverse learners. Creating forums for dialogue among educators, parents, and specialists will enhance mutual understanding and commitment to inclusive education. Collectively, these efforts can transform schools into nurturing environments where all children, regardless of their abilities, are valued and supported to reach their full potential.

### CONCLUSION

This study conceptualizes a multidisciplinary support system designed to meet the complex and varied needs of Children With Special Needs (CWSN) in school settings. By integrating the expertise of educators, mental health professionals, therapists, families, and policymakers, the framework promotes an inclusive educational environment aligned with the principles of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020. The model emphasizes early identification, personalized intervention, and ongoing collaboration, which are essential for enhancing academic, social, and emotional outcomes for CWSN. While challenges such as resource limitations, training gaps, and systemic barriers exist, addressing these proactively can pave the way for effective implementation and sustainable inclusive practices.

Ultimately, the success of such a multidisciplinary approach depends on collective commitment, continuous capacity building, and a culture of empathy and inclusion within schools and communities. This framework not only supports children with special needs but also enriches the learning environment for all students, fostering diversity and mutual respect. Future research and practice should focus on translating this conceptual model into actionable strategies, evaluating its impact, and refining it based on emerging needs and contexts. Through such efforts, inclusive education can become a lived reality, ensuring that every child has the opportunity to thrive in a supportive and nurturing school setting.

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### **Conflict of Interest**

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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