

Inclusive Education: Fostering Inclusive Learning Environment

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Abstract

Education is a fundamental human right, essential for the development of individuals and societies. Yet, for many years, students with diverse needs — including those with disabilities, from marginalized communities, or with different cultural or linguistic backgrounds — have been excluded from mainstream educational opportunities. Inclusive education is a transformative approach that aims to eliminate these barriers, ensuring that all students, regardless of their abilities or backgrounds, learn together in the same environment. It explores the concept of inclusive education, its objectives, benefits, challenges, and effective strategies for implementation. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) defines inclusive education as "a process of strengthening the capacity of the education system to reach out to all learners." It involves restructuring the school culture, policies, and practices to accommodate every student's unique needs.

Keywords: Inclusive education, inclusive environment, policies, equal access, social justice.

Introduction

Inclusive education refers to the practice of educating all students in regular classrooms, where they are provided with the necessary support to thrive academically, socially, and emotionally. It is rooted in the belief that diversity in the classroom enriches the learning experience for everyone. This approach moves away from the traditional model of segregating students with special needs into separate institutions or classrooms, and instead promotes full participation, equal opportunities, and respect for all learners. Inclusive education: Fostering inclusive learning environments involves creating educational settings where all students, regardless of their disabilities, backgrounds, or needs, feel welcomed, valued, and supported. It emphasizes the right of every child to access quality education within mainstream schools by removing barriers to learning and participation. Inclusive learning environments are built on principles of equity, respect for diversity, and

collaborative teaching practices. They provide tailored support through differentiated instruction, assistive technologies, and accessible infrastructure to meet the unique needs of each learner. Teachers play a vital role by fostering a culture of empathy, adapting teaching methods, and encouraging peer support. Such environments not only benefit students with special needs but also enhance the social, emotional, and academic development of all learners. By promoting shared learning experiences, inclusive education helps build a more just, compassionate, and cohesive society.

Figure 1 Importance of Inclusive Education



Source: <https://www.21kschool.com/ge/blog/inclusive-education-in-india/>

Objectives of Inclusive Education

The primary objectives of inclusive education include: all students, regardless of disability, gender, ethnicity, language, or socioeconomic status, should have access to quality education in mainstream settings. It seeks to eliminate discrimination and reduce educational disparities by addressing the diverse needs of all learners. Beyond academics, inclusive education emphasizes the emotional, social, and moral development of students through shared experiences and mutual respect. By learning together, students are encouraged to embrace diversity, thereby cultivating empathy, cooperation, and positive social interactions. Schools that practice inclusion contribute to building a society that values all its members and upholds the principles of dignity, equality, and justice.

Benefits of Inclusive Education

Inclusive education offers numerous benefits to both students with special needs and their peers. Research shows that students with disabilities perform better academically when taught

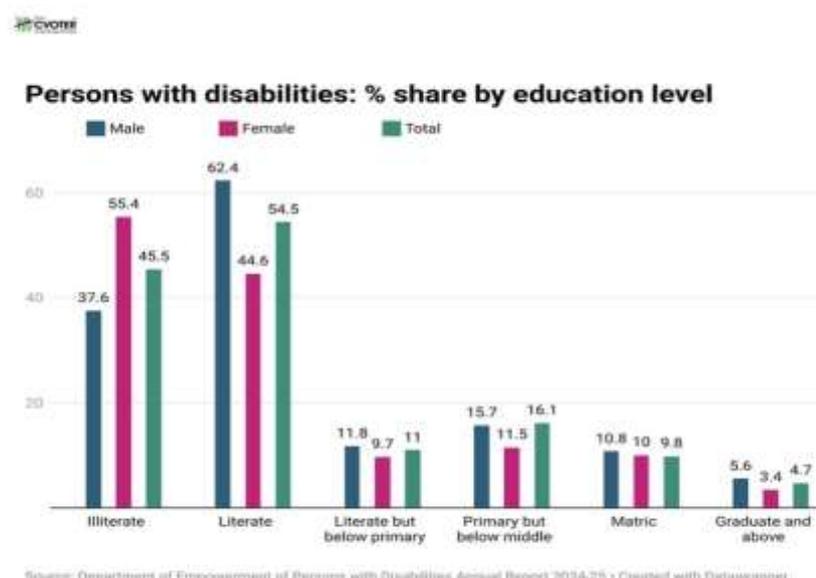
in inclusive settings due to higher expectations and peer modeling. Inclusive classrooms promote friendships, reduce feelings of isolation, and enhance the self-esteem of all students. Teachers in inclusive settings gain new skills in differentiated instruction, classroom management, and collaborative teaching. Exposure to diversity reduces prejudices and encourages a more accepting attitude towards differences. Inclusive classrooms mirror the diversity of society, preparing students for life in a multicultural and interdependent world.

Challenges in Implementing Inclusive Education

Despite its advantages, inclusive education faces several barriers:

1. Many schools lack the infrastructure, teaching aids, and trained staff needed to support inclusive practices effectively.
2. Not all educators are adequately trained to manage diverse classrooms or address the specific needs of students with disabilities.
3. Societal and institutional biases against children with disabilities or learning difficulties can hinder inclusion.
4. Standardized teaching and evaluation methods often fail to accommodate diverse learning styles and needs.
5. Although many countries have adopted inclusive education policies, there is often a gap between policy intent and ground-level execution.

Figure 2 Status of Inclusive Education



Source: <https://www.indiatracker.in/story/indias-disability-divide-persists-women-most-excluded-by-new-infrastructure>

Inclusive education is not merely a pedagogical choice; it is a moral imperative and a step toward social equity. It acknowledges the right of every child to receive a quality education in a nurturing, respectful, and inclusive environment. While the journey toward full inclusion presents challenges, the potential rewards — a more compassionate society, stronger educational outcomes, and empowered individuals — make it a goal worth striving for. With collaborative efforts from governments, educators, families, and communities, inclusive education can move from policy to practice, ensuring that no child is left behind. The objectives of policies on Inclusive Education are designed to ensure that all learners, regardless of their physical, intellectual, social, emotional, linguistic, or other conditions, have equal access to quality education. Here are the key objectives commonly found in inclusive education policies. Ensure that all children, including those with disabilities, marginalized groups, or learning difficulties, have equal opportunities to attend mainstream schools and receive quality education. Remove all forms of discrimination, exclusion, and barriers to learning and participation in the education system, ensuring that schools are welcoming and responsive to diverse needs. Ensure that national policies align with global frameworks like the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4) on inclusive and equitable quality education, and UNESCO’s Education 2030 Framework.

Policy Perspective for Inclusive Education

The National Policy on Education, 1986 (NPE, 1986) was a landmark initiative by the Government of India aimed at restructuring and revitalizing the Indian education system to make it more responsive to the needs of the nation. This policy emphasized the importance of education in achieving national development, social integration, and economic progress. One of its key focuses was on promoting equality by reducing disparities across gender, caste, and regions. It advocated for the universalization of elementary education, the eradication of illiteracy, and the improvement of educational quality at all levels. Importantly, the policy recognized the need for inclusive education, stressing the integration of children with disabilities into regular schools and providing them with necessary support services. The NPE, 1986 also laid strong emphasis on teacher education, vocational training, adult education, and the use of technology in classrooms. Revised in 1992 and eventually

succeeded by the National Education Policy 2020, the NPE, 1986 served as a foundation for many progressive reforms in the Indian education sector.

The Rehabilitation Council of India (RCI) Act, enacted in 1992 and later amended in 2000, is a landmark legislation in India's journey toward the empowerment and inclusion of persons with disabilities. This Act provides the legal framework for regulating training programs and professionals involved in the rehabilitation of individuals with disabilities. It represents a significant commitment by the Government of India to ensure quality services for people with disabilities and to professionalize the field of rehabilitation.

Prior to the RCI Act, there was no standardized system to regulate or certify the qualifications of rehabilitation professionals in India. The field lacked structured training, and unqualified individuals often provided rehabilitation services, which compromised the quality of care and hindered the progress of individuals with disabilities. To address this gap, the Rehabilitation Council of India was initially set up as a society in 1986. Recognizing the growing need for formal regulation, the Indian Parliament enacted the RCI Act in 1992, conferring statutory powers to the Council. This Act aimed to maintain standards in training and regulate the professional conduct of individuals working in this critical sector.

The primary objectives of the RCI Act, 1992 are to prescribe and monitor minimum standards of education and training for various rehabilitation professions. And also maintaining a Central Rehabilitation Register of qualified professionals and prohibit unqualified persons from practicing. RCI is also providing grant recognition to institutions offering rehabilitation courses and to monitor the quality of education and training they provide. Also encouraging research and innovation in rehabilitation practices and education. RCI has to ensure that people with disabilities receive services only from certified professionals, thus upholding their rights to quality care and support. The RCI Act covers a wide range of rehabilitation professionals, including: Special educators, Audiologists and speech-language pathologists, Clinical psychologists, Rehabilitation therapists, Orientation and mobility instructors, Vocational counselors, Other categories specified by the Council. The Act also outlines procedures for granting recognition to training institutions and courses. Only those individuals who complete RCI-recognized programs are eligible for registration and professional practice. The Act formalized the establishment of the Council as a statutory body responsible for overseeing rehabilitation education and practice. It is mandatory for all professionals working in the field of rehabilitation and special education to register with the

RCI to legally practice in India. A national register is maintained to keep a record of qualified rehabilitation professionals. The Act imposes penalties on individuals who practice without registration or institutions that run unrecognized programs. The Council has the authority to conduct inspections and monitor compliance among training institutions.

The Act was amended in 2000 to strengthen its provisions. The amendment expanded the Council's role and powers, increased penalties for non-compliance, and improved regulatory mechanisms. It also clarified definitions and procedures, making the Act more effective and responsive to the evolving needs of the disability sector. Since its implementation, the RCI Act has had a profound impact on the rehabilitation sector in India: It has raised the bar for professional qualifications, ensuring that services are provided by trained and certified individuals. Regular monitoring and standard-setting have improved the quality of training programs and services. The Act plays a key role in protecting the rights of people with disabilities to access appropriate and competent rehabilitation services. It aligns with India's commitments under the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) and the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (RPwD) Act, 2016.

Persons with Disabilities Act, 1995: Equal Opportunity, Protection of Rights, and Full Participation

Disability rights are fundamental to ensuring an inclusive, equitable society. Recognizing this, the Government of India passed the Persons with Disabilities (Equal Opportunities, Protection of Rights and Full Participation) Act, 1995, commonly referred to as the PwD Act. It marked a significant milestone in India's commitment to safeguard the dignity and rights of persons with disabilities (PwDs). Enacted in line with India's participation in the United Nations Conference on Human Rights and the Asian and Pacific Decade of Disabled Persons (1993–2002), this Act aimed to integrate PwDs into the mainstream through legal, educational, and employment provisions. This essay explores the objectives, key provisions, impacts, and limitations of the Act.

Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA), 2002 is a flagship program launched by the Government of India with the goal of achieving Universalization of Elementary Education (UEE) in a time-bound manner. Introduced in 2002, SSA aims to provide free and compulsory education to all children in the 6–14 age group, in line with the 86th Constitutional Amendment, which made

education a fundamental right under Article 21-A. The program focuses on bridging social, regional, and gender gaps, and improving the quality of education across the country. SSA include opening new schools in underserved areas, strengthening existing school infrastructure, recruiting additional teachers, promoting inclusive education for children with special needs, and encouraging community participation through school management committees. SSA places special emphasis on marginalized and disadvantaged groups such as girls, scheduled castes (SCs), scheduled tribes (STs), and children with disabilities. Over the years, SSA has significantly improved enrollment rates, reduced dropout levels, and expanded access to education, especially in rural and remote areas. In 2018, SSA was subsumed under the Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan, which integrates school education from pre-primary to senior secondary levels.

The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education (Amendment) Bill, 2012 was introduced to address gaps in the implementation of the original RTE Act, 2009. This amendment specifically aimed to include children with disabilities within the purview of the Act, recognizing their right to inclusive education. It amended Section 2 of the RTE Act to expand the definition of “child” to include children with disabilities as defined under the Persons with Disabilities (Equal Opportunities, Protection of Rights and Full Participation) Act, 1995 and the National Trust Act, 1999. Furthermore, it ensured that children with disabilities are not only entitled to free and compulsory education from ages 6 to 14 but also eligible for appropriate support and facilities to learn effectively. This amendment marked a significant step toward realizing inclusive education in India by mandating that mainstream schools adapt to the needs of children with special needs, thus promoting equality and non-discrimination in the education system. Approach realization refers to the practical implementation and execution of a conceptual framework or strategy in a real-world context. It involves translating theoretical ideas, methodologies, or models into actionable steps that lead to tangible outcomes.

Conclusion and Discussion

In education, for instance, approach realization might include adopting inclusive teaching strategies that are not just planned but actively practiced in classrooms. In engineering or management, it could mean putting a design or policy into operation, ensuring it aligns with intended objectives. The realization phase often requires careful planning, resource allocation, and continuous evaluation to adapt the approach effectively to dynamic environments and stakeholder needs. Preparing materials is a crucial step in any instructional,

creative, or professional process. It involves gathering, organizing, and tailoring resources—such as tools, documents, equipment, or content—to suit the specific goals of a task or project. Effective material preparation ensures smooth execution, saves time, enhances efficiency, and minimizes errors. In educational settings, for example, teachers must prepare lesson plans, teaching aids, and learning materials in advance to foster better student engagement and understanding. In industries or construction work, preparing the right materials in the correct quantity and quality ensures safety and timely completion. Whether in teaching, manufacturing, or planning events, the careful preparation of materials sets the foundation for success. Organization refers to the systematic arrangement of people, resources, and processes to achieve specific goals efficiently and effectively. It involves structuring tasks, defining roles and responsibilities, coordinating activities, and setting up communication channels to ensure smooth functioning. In educational settings, organization helps manage time, materials, and classroom activities to create an environment conducive to learning. In workplaces, strong organizational systems improve productivity, accountability, and teamwork. Whether planning an event, running a business, or managing a household, good organization reduces confusion, prevents delays, and ensures that objectives are met in a timely and orderly manner. It is a fundamental skill for success across all areas of life. Networking of the following is a must for successful inclusion: schools, families, community members, special educators, rehabilitation professionals, government bodies, and non-governmental organizations.

Inclusion, particularly in education, requires the collaborative efforts of various stakeholders to address the diverse needs of all learners, especially those with disabilities or learning difficulties. Schools must work closely with parents to understand students' individual needs and ensure consistent support at home and in class. Community involvement fosters acceptance, reduces stigma, and provides additional resources. Special educators and therapists offer expert guidance on appropriate strategies and accommodations. Government agencies ensure legal support, policies, and funding, while NGOs often contribute with training, advocacy, and innovative practices. When these networks function together, they create an inclusive environment that values diversity, promotes equality, and supports every learner's growth and participation.

An inclusive classroom is a diverse learning environment where children of varying abilities and backgrounds learn together. It may include children with physical disabilities, learning

disabilities, sensory impairments (such as hearing or vision loss), intellectual disabilities, speech and language disorders, and developmental delays. Additionally, it may accommodate children on the autism spectrum, children with emotional or behavioral challenges, and gifted or talented students who require differentiated instruction. Inclusive classes also welcome children from marginalized communities, children affected by trauma, and those who speak different mother tongues. The aim of such a setting is to provide equal educational opportunities, fostering empathy, collaboration, and respect among all students while catering to their individual learning needs through tailored instructional strategies.

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