



INCLUSIVE EDUCATION: POLICIES, PRACTICES, AND ATTITUDES

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Article DOI: <https://doi.org/10.36713/epra21787>

DOI No: 10.36713/epra21787

ABSTRACT

Education is a fundamental right for every person. As a means of fostering an inclusive society where equal chances are offered, inclusive education has become decisively entrenched as the primary educational policy for children with a variety of requirements, diverse needs including disabilities. Therefore, inclusive education has a major role as it has an interactive relationship with society and especially with the community along with parents of these children. Teachers play an important role of facilitator, guide as well as advocates children with diverse learners. Teachers teach the students with differing learning styles based on the requirement of the learners. In spite of the various strategies and techniques some concerns have been raised about the impact of such a change on the educational system, as well as whether it will actually be possible to implement. The range of learning difficulties, potential knowledge outcomes, teacher's attitude and teachers' lack of confidence to teach in an inclusive atmosphere are the key reasons why educators have worries and apprehensions about inclusion. In this current study, we made an attempt to explore teachers' attitudes toward inclusive education as well as examine the current prevalent inclusive policies and practices in the educational system of India. According to the findings of this study, teachers have attitudes that are usually favourable towards inclusion. However, they identified some challenges and impediments to the implementation of inclusiveness in the schools. We believe that policymakers in India should prioritize teacher training and expand educational financing in order to provide best inclusive educational practices in the schools.

KEYWORDS: *Inclusive Education, Diverse Learners, Inclusive Policies, Teacher's Attitude.*

INTRODUCTION

Children with disabilities are taught alongside classmates their own age who are not disabled in traditional educational settings. This practice is known as inclusionary education. It necessitates that conventional classrooms and schools make genuine adjustments and changes to meet the needs of all children while simultaneously valuing and honoring differences. The ability to learn and participate in school and extracurricular activities is shared by all children. The definition of inclusive education given by UNESCO in 2005 is: "a process of addressing and reacting to the diversity of needs of all learners through promoting involvement in learning, cultures, and communities, and eliminating exclusion from and within education." It is promoted as a method to lower obstacles, improve outcomes, and eliminate discrimination. The required support services and supplementary help for both students and teachers are provided for special education kids. A mainstream school and community actively accepts, welcomes, and involves the children (Farrel, 2004). It entails fulfilling the needs of all students—including those with disabilities—for a cost-free, excellent public education in the setting that is both the least constrictive and most productive. As a result, inclusive education focuses on the presence, involvement, and success of all learners (Ainscow, 2005;

Engelbrecht and Green, 2007). Inclusion education refers to the process of upgrading the educational system to deliver EFA.

All educational activities should be based on the idea that education is a basic human right. Regardless of a child's physical, intellectual, emotional, or learning handicap, it is an educational strategy founded on the social foundation of justice that promotes equitable access to educational opportunities for all children (Loreman et al., 2005). According to Norwich (1996), inclusive education aims to acknowledge and take into account both the similarities among students as well as their distinctions and diversity. According to Lipsky and Gartner (1997), inclusive education is not a special education reform. The worldwide statement on education for all was adopted in Jomtien. Thailand gave equity and ensuring that all children, teenagers, and adults have access to education a high priority in 1990. Regular schools have to undergo significant adjustments. The World Education Forum emphasised the requirement that the needs of those who are underprivileged be taken into account when evaluating the advancements made since 1990. The Salamanca Statement Conference took place in Salamanca, Spain, in June 1994. It was established on the excellence and accessibility of inclusive education. According to the EFA Global Monitoring Report 2005,



one strategy for achieving a pertinent, well-balanced set of objectives is to examine the curriculum in terms of inclusivity. In other words, altering systems to be inclusive is what inclusion is all about.

The UNCRPD was adopted in 2006, and thus encourages inclusive education. The Convention represents the culmination of decades of UN efforts to alter perceptions and methods of dealing with people with disabilities. It advances the shift away from seeing people with disabilities as "objects" of charity, medical care, and social protection and towards seeing them as "subjects" with rights, capable of asserting those rights, making decisions about their lives with their free, informed consent, and contributing to society.

Inclusive Legal Provision in India

Children with disabilities encounter numerous obstacles to inclusion in ordinary settings, which may limit their access to social services, healthcare, education, and community involvement. Many programmes, laws, and policies grant disabled people legal rights. Sargent's 1944 report on mainstreaming schools is where the beginning point for India comes from. (Julka, 2005) Following that, the Kothari Commission put an emphasis on creating an inclusive, public school system from 1964 to 1966. It stressed the need to "eliminate the current social segregation in schools by adopting the neighbourhood school concept at the lower primary stage, under which all children in the neighbourhood will be required to attend the local school." Disability education was the primary emphasis of NEP's first education strategy in 1986. It places a focus on eliminating inequalities and ensuring equal access to education.

Rehabilitation Council of India Act, 1992

In 1986, the Rehabilitation Council of India was founded and registered as a society. The failure of a society to ensure appropriate standards and other Organisations' adoption of the rules was swiftly recognised, nevertheless. The RCI Act was adopted in 1992. The Rehabilitation Council of India became a Statutory Body on June 22, 1993, according to a statute passed by the Parliament.

- The RCI Act, which places the Council in charge of setting standards, was expanded by the Parliament in 2000. Additionally,
- It states that anyone providing services to people with disabilities without having their processing credentials recognised by RCI may face legal action.
- The dual duties of the Council include standardising and controlling the education of employees and professionals in the fields of rehabilitation and special education.

RPWD 2016

The Policy supports CwSN provisions in accordance with the 2016 Rights of Persons with Disabilities (RPwD) Act. In general, inclusive education refers to a welcoming and encouraging learning environment that supports students with various talents,

learning styles, and challenges. The policy supports a whole-school inclusion strategy and promotes the inclusion and equal participation of CwSN at all educational levels.

NEP 2020

As stated in the National Education Policy (NEP), 2020, "education is the single greatest tool for achieving social justice and equality," which has implications for the development of an inclusive community and society at large. If policy is to be implemented, issues with facilities, services, and educational barriers for children with special needs (CwSN) must be resolved. Containing a dedicated chapter on equitable and inclusive education that focuses on issues, challenges, and recommendations for bridging the gaps and getting rid of inequities in access and participation for all students.

Central sponsored Scheme`

All children's basic education is the goal of SSA, while middle level education is the focus of RMSA at the school level. The integrated SamagraShiksha programme, which is centrally funded by the Ministry of Education, then offers schooling to pupils in pre-primary through senior secondary levels. The programme seeks to offer equal access to educational opportunities by assisting all States and UTs in implementing the NEP's recommendations. Making sure there is equity and inclusion at all educational levels is one of the plan's primary objectives. Education that is inclusive of students with special needs is one of the interventions. This component includes a number of initiatives, such as block level assessment camps for the identification of disabilities, assistance with orientation and awareness campaigns, therapy services, sporting events, and initiatives to develop the ability of special educators.

Through a variety of initiatives and activities, the Ministry of Education supports inclusive, top-notch education for children with exceptional needs. Through programmes like the ePathshala portal and mobile app platform, which give students, teachers, and parents free access to NCERT books and e-content, NCERT has made a determined effort to improve student learning. NCERT textbooks also come in audio format. Additional reading material has also been produced by NCERT. In order to increase public awareness of accessibility-related concerns, the comic book "Priya- the Accessibility Warrior" was created. The book's central thesis is that "Everyone Needs Accessibility, Accessibility Helps Everyone." There are additional videos explaining the comic book in Indian Sign Language (ISL). Additionally, through studying the ISL language, a list of frequently used ISL terms has been compiled. More than 935 textbook videos produced by CIET and NCERT, as well as a 10,500 word ISL lexicon, are available on the DIKSHA website.

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Review of Literature

Research across various countries has shown that while teachers generally express positive attitudes towards inclusive education, several influencing factors affect these attitudes and the effective implementation of inclusion policies. Charitaki (2022) found that teaching experience, education level, and qualifications significantly influence teachers' perspectives globally. Similarly, Zakiah et al. (2021) noted a 76.8% implementation rate of inclusive policies in elementary schools, highlighting the need for more teacher training and infrastructure support. In Finland, Saloviita (2020) revealed divided attitudes, with special-education teachers more supportive of inclusion than general educators. Indian studies by Lakshmi (2018) and Ganeshan & Vethirajan (2005) underscored infrastructural and conceptual challenges. Galaterou (2017) identified job stress and demographics as factors affecting teacher attitudes, while Pappas et al. (2018) reported positive views tempered by practical barriers. Unianu (2012) also emphasized age-related differences in inclusion understanding. Overall, while support for inclusion exists, its success depends on addressing systemic, educational, and emotional challenges faced by educators.

METHOD

Objectives

1. To find out the teachers' attitudes toward inclusive education

Gender	Mean	S.D	df	N	t-value	Sig.
Male	27.39	9.983	28	18	-0.413	At 0.005 Level
Female	28.75	6.703		12		

As per the mean scores of attitude towards inclusion of male teachers (27.39) and female teachers (28.75) did not differ

2. To identify barriers towards inclusion
3. To examine the current prevalent inclusive policies and practices in the educational system of India

Research Questions

The current research specifically attempts to respond to the following questions in order to achieve the objectives

1. What is the teacher's attitude toward inclusive education?
2. What are the main barriers to inclusion based on teacher's attitudes?
3. What are the present inclusive policies in the education of children with disabled existing in India?

Research Design: This study employed descriptive research.

Sample: 30 Teachers working in inclusive schools were selected.

Tools used for the study: A Questionnaire with 10 items was employed to find out the teachers' attitudes toward inclusive education to identify barriers towards inclusion. To examine the current prevalent inclusive policies and practices in the educational system of India, literature review was used under secondary research method.

Data Collection & Administration

The questionnaire was distributed in the form of Google forms through email and WhatsApp. As the questionnaire was self-paced without time restriction, in total 30 responses received.

Result

Data was analyzed both quantitatively and qualitatively to find out the teachers' attitudes toward inclusive education to identify barriers towards inclusion and to examine the current prevalent inclusive policies and practices in the educational system of India. To find out the teachers' attitudes toward inclusive education to identify barriers towards inclusion mean, standard deviation and t-test was used and the details are explained in the following table

significantly, the results revealed that there is no difference in the attitude towards inclusion of male and female teachers.

Expected outcome of Inclusion	Mean (X)	Standard Deviation (SD)
In improving communication skills and social interaction	4.10	1.423
In social development and behavior	4.10	1.296
In social skills	4.10	1.296
In academic performance	3.83	1.341
To enhance self-confidence	3.83	1.416



As findings indicated, participants believe that students with disabilities will benefit from inclusion in terms of their communication skills and social interaction ($M = 4.10$, $SD = 1.423$), social development, behaviour and social skills ($M = 4.10$, $SD = 1.296$), in enhancing self-confidence ($M = 3.83$, $SD = 1.416$) and in academic performance ($M = 3.83$, $SD = 1.341$).

To identify barriers towards inclusion mean and standard deviation was used and the results revealed that lack of Specialized training in special Education programmes ($M = 3.10$, $SD = 1.470$), Teachers' reluctance ($M = 3.90$, $SD = 1.75$), Curriculum ($M = 3.68$, $SD = 1.416$), School Infrastructure ($M = 3.73$, $SD = 1.311$), Parents' Attitudes ($M = 3.59$, $SD = 1.268$), Incomplete Funding ($M = 3.90$, $SD = 1.175$), Legislative Framework ($M = 3.86$, $SD = 1.187$), Special and Gender Teacher Collaboration ($M = 3.57$, $SD = 1.501$), Large number of children in classroom ($M = 3.77$, $SD = 1.382$), Failure to provide appropriate special education ($M = 3.83$, $SD = 1.289$). From the above results we can understand that all the barriers are affecting the inclusive education in India significantly.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Teachers who participated in the study seem to support the inclusion of children with disabilities in the mainstream classrooms, indicating at the same time the benefits of inclusion for them along with their peers. However, they seem more cautious for some types of disabilities, such as students with mental illness, IDD, and multiples disabilities. Some of the studies like (Alghazo et al. 2003; Woodcock 2013) reported no effect on gender in the attitude towards inclusive education. Furthermore, as far as age is concerned, younger teachers tend to adopt more favourable views toward the inclusion of students with special educational needs (Gal et al. 2010; Subban and Sharma 2006). Finally, as revealed from the results, lack of Specialized training in special Education programmes, Teachers' reluctance, Curriculum, School Infrastructure, Parents' Attitudes, Special and Gender Teacher Collaboration and Large number of children in classroom are the main barriers to the implementation of inclusive education in India.

Inclusion frequently requires a shift in people's views and values. Such change takes time and calls for a careful analysis of ideas and role behaviours. The goal of raising awareness should be to increase both understanding of inclusive education and the change towards tolerant and understanding communities. National policies on inclusion, local support networks, adequate curricula, and effective evaluation techniques are necessary for creating the foundation for the expansion of inclusion. Higher education institutions shouldn't view themselves as the only experts on education. While expertise may not be present in every school, it is essential to ensure that students have access to certain skills when they need them. A few of the stakeholders who can be helpful resources in favour of inclusion are teachers, other educators, non-teaching support staff, parents, communities, school administrators, curriculum developers, educational

planners, the private sector, and training institutions. Some (teachers, parents, and communities) are more than just helpful resources; they are essential to furthering all aspects of the inclusion process. This needs to be backed up by a desire to value diversity and get involved with students' lives outside of the classroom.

The implementation of inclusive education is a complicated process that necessitates, in addition to the appropriate laws, the participation of numerous variables in the decision-making process. The appointment of special educators and supporting staff for all-inclusive schools is seen as vital in this trend for better education. In order to reduce the educational and social marginalisation of students with disabilities, it is also believed to be vital to eliminate outdated stereotypes. In order to create a successful inclusive society, administrators and stakeholders should support inclusive practises that aim to modernise and upgrade the educational system.

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