

Current Status of Inclusive Education in India

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Abstract

India has exhibited a robust commitment to ensuring that all children, including those with disabilities, have access to fundamental education rights. Being an early adopter of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), India emphasizes providing inclusive and high-quality education for children with disabilities. Central to India's educational mandate is the principle of inclusive education, ensuring free and compulsory education for all children aged 6 to 14. This approach encompasses various groups, including children from remote communities, minorities, and those with disabilities, who are integrated into inclusive classrooms. Policies such as the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009 (RTE), the 'no rejection policy' of the SarvaShikshaAbhiyan (SSA), and recognition of education as a fundamental right under Article 21A of the Indian Constitution drive this inclusive agenda. These policies have facilitated the integration of children with disabilities, also known as children with special needs (CWSN), into mainstream schools, regardless of the severity of their disabilities. The National Curriculum Framework (2005) emphasizes child-centered pedagogy to address the diverse challenges associated with inclusive education in India.

Keywords: Disabled Students, Government of India, Inclusive Education, RTE and The Teachers.

Introduction

All students are welcomed and encouraged to learn in an inclusive education system, which does not discriminate based on their identities, talents, or needs. It entails making sure that all students, regardless of their ability, may easily access and make use of the school's curriculum, instructional methods, recreational areas, transportation, and other facilities. This method offers a fresh outlook on teaching children with impairments, allowing them to go to school, study, and acquire lifelong skills. For historically marginalized populations, such as minority language speakers and children with disabilities, inclusive education is about breaking down barriers to education and ensuring that all students have equal access to quality education in mainstream classrooms and schools. Inclusionary education is beneficial for all parties because it creates a space where students from different backgrounds can study and grow together. Disabled children, like other children, have the right to an inclusive education, and this document stresses that no kid should be left out.

Characteristics of Inclusive Education

- Every child possesses the entitlement to receive an education and equal access to engage in regular schooling.

- Inclusive education adapts instructional strategies to accommodate the individual learning requirements of each student and offers suitable levels of assistance..
- The objective of inclusive education is to ensure that all children, not just those initially enrolled, fully engage in and complete their education.
- Collaboration among principals, teachers, parents, and other stakeholders is essential in identifying the most effective strategies for delivering high-quality education to students.
- Educational goals are developed by considering the individual needs and abilities of each student.
- Inclusive education does not require all students to have identical educational objectives for them to learn together in typical classrooms.
- Embracing and celebrating diversity and differences is a key aspect of inclusive education.
- Inclusive education is primarily implemented in a teaching-learning environment within community schools, where students of varying abilities learn together during regular instruction hours.
- The primary aim of inclusive education is to meet the educational needs of each child through well-designed teaching and learning activities.
- Inclusive education ensures that every student, regardless of disability type or severity, receives personalized instruction and is not denied access to education.
- Inclusive education fosters cooperative and collaborative learning environments, with involvement from parents, teachers, staff, and administration..

Essential Components for Inclusive Education

- **Involving Parents:** Getting parents and communities involved is essential, and they should be inspired and motivated to spearhead change. The child's acceptance by parents and community members shapes his or her personality and determines how other family members and community members will treat him or her.
- **Support Services:** To cater to the educational needs of all children, comprehensive support services should be provided as fully as possible within the school environment. These services encompass a range of offerings such as occupational therapy, physical therapy, speech therapy, early intervention, psychological assessment, and counseling.
- **Equal Opportunities and Full Participation –** The foundation of inclusive education is the idea that children with special needs should have equal opportunities and full participation. The administration of the school bears the duty of demonstrating commitment and restructuring the school's culture, policies, and practices to accommodate students with different needs in a range of academic and extracurricular activities.
- **Barrier-free Environment -** The first step towards inclusion is accessibility to all areas of the building and classrooms, which is followed by an atmosphere of comfort for teaching and learning.
- **Educational materials** such as Braille textbooks and relevant resources like audio books need to be accessible and provided.
- **Teacher Training:** Educators who oversee and instruct students are made aware of the idea and principles of inclusive education, as well as the need for modifications to the physical environment, curriculum flexibility, and instructional strategies. Short-term courses and ongoing rehabilitation education programs will give pre-service and in-service teachers the knowledge and skills they need to deal with diversity and children with various disabilities.

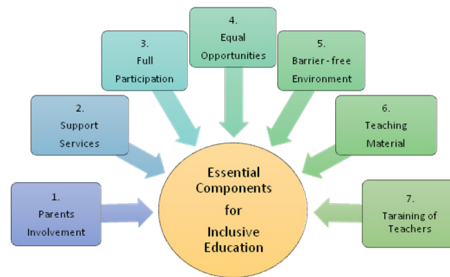


Figure 1 Essential Components for Inclusive Education

Demanding Situations to Enforce Inclusive Education in India

India, known for its rich linguistic, religious, and cultural diversity, along with caste and socioeconomic disparities, stands as the world’s second most populous nation, with a population of 1.21 billion, constituting 17% of the global population. However, it also harbors 20% of the global out-of-school student population. According to the 2011 Census of India, an estimated 26 million individuals in the country live with disabilities, accounting for around 2.1% of the total population. Despite various government initiatives aimed at special education since independence, teaching children with disabilities in regular classrooms faces significant challenges due to inadequate resources and negative societal attitudes. Efforts to implement inclusive policies for individuals with disabilities have fallen short, exacerbated by the lack of infrastructure in the majority of Indian schools to accommodate their needs. Without addressing the needs of physically and mentally challenged children, achieving the government’s goal of Universalizing Elementary Education (UEE) remains a daunting task.

History of Inclusive Education in India

Numerous policy initiatives in India have aimed to promote inclusive education and support individuals with disabilities over the years. The Sargent Report of 1944 proposed special education for individuals with disabilities, followed by post-independence efforts by the Ministry of Education to ensure specialized education for children with special needs. The Kothari Commission (1964-66) advocated for inclusive education through the neighborhood school concept, while the Integrated Education for Disabled Children (IEDC - 1974) encouraged the integration of children with disabilities into regular school systems. During the Five-Year Plan period (1980-1985), strategies were devised to increase funding and develop supplementary policies to support integrated education. The Project Integrated Education for Disabled Children (PIED - 1987) facilitated integration through teacher training and composite area approaches. Subsequent revisions, such as the IEDC (1992) and UNESCO Salamanca Statement (1994), continued to advocate for inclusive education. Initiatives like the District Primary Education Project (DPEP - 1994) and the SarvaShikshaAbhiyan (SSA - 2001) furthered the cause, while international agreements like Article 24 of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006) and national legislation like the Right to Education Act (RTE - 2010) and the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (RPWD) Act of 2016 strengthened the framework for inclusive education. The National Education Policy (NEP - 2020) introduced by the Indian government builds on these efforts, expanding the scope of inclusive education and reaffirming the commitment to providing equal opportunities in education for all individuals, regardless of disability.

India's Status of Inclusive Education as of the 2011 Census Disable Students Attendance According to 2011- Census

- 61 of the student population is disabled and attends school.
- The percentage of disabled students enrolled in the schools was 12%.
- Of the disabled student population, 27% have never attended school.

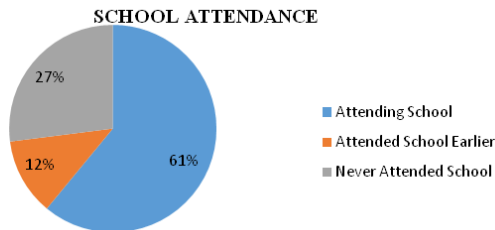


Figure 2 Disable Students Attendance According to 2011- Census

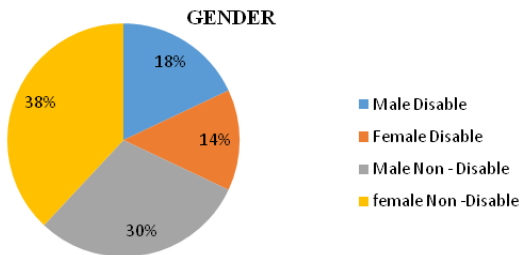


Figure 3 Gender Ratio in Inclusive Schools According to 2011- Census

Gender Ratio Attending Inclusive Schools According To 2011- Census

- 30% Non-disable male students are attending inclusive schools.
- 18% Disable male students are attending inclusive schools.
- 38% Non-disabled female students are attending inclusive schools.
- 14% Disabled female students are attending inclusive schools.

Academic Performance as of the 2011 Census

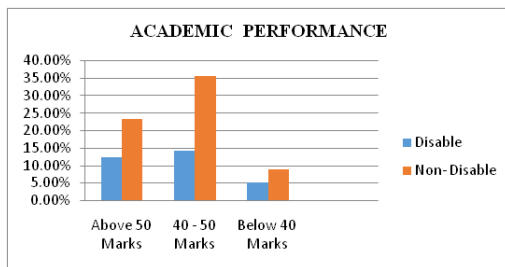


Figure 4 Academic Performance According to 2011- Census

Students with disabilities and students without disabilities perform academically differently in notable ways.

- Of students without disabilities, 23.26% have high academic performance (above 50 marks)’ compared to 12.31% with disabilities.
- The average academic performance of 14.35% of disabled students and 35.65% of non-disabled students is between 40 and 50 marks.
- 8.91% of non disabled students and 5.22% of disabled students perform poorly academically (below 40 marks).

Challenges in Inclusive Education

- **Policy Execution:** Those in charges should be sincere and dedicated enough to carry out inclusive education policies and to apply the rights and provisions of the constitution without taking technicalities and loop holes into account.
- **Social Attitude towards Disability:** We need to plan events aimed at raising public awareness of disabilities and developing a constructive social climate for children who are marginalized and differently abled.
- **Parental Resistance:** Awareness campaigns and print and digital media ads should inform the parents and families of these children about the rights and provisions.
- **Boost Skill based Teaching:** Candidates for traditional teacher education programmes should also be trained in how to work with these children.
- **Research and Practice:** Should be linked through disability focused studies, chaired disability studies at universities and the establishment centers for disabilities studies in academic institutions.
- **Peer Coaching:** In inclusive educational settings, Peer Coaching is essential for improving teaching and learning.

Conclusion

Inclusive education enables the creation of a classroom environment that caters to the needs of all students, including those with disabilities, thereby fostering a safe learning space where children from various backgrounds can thrive. The key to enabling disabled people to lead successful lives is inclusive education. Supporting children not only in their academic endeavors but also in their daily lives is essential because it will prepare them to overcome challenges and barriers that they will face in the real world. For this reason, in addition to the government, educators and parents must also have sufficient knowledge about inclusive in the classroom. Additionally, all children must participate in education. Without exception, every child should be treated with the same respect and dignity. Only then can inclusive education in our nation truly succeed.

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