



Inclusive Education in India: Strategic Management for Empowering Differently Abled Learners

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Abstract:

Inclusive education for differently-abled children is a progressive approach that aims to provide equitable educational opportunities to students with a wide range of abilities, regardless of their disabilities. This comprehensive study delves into the multifaceted aspects of inclusive education, focusing on the current status of inclusive education in India and role of government in implementing various policies and efforts undertaken by them to make people aware above the policies and rules framed for differently abled children. The research draws upon a diverse range of data sources, including case studies, secondary sources and policy analysis, to provide a holistic understanding of the current state of inclusive education for differently abled children. The study's findings will reveal the multifaceted nature of inclusive education, emphasizing the importance of inclusive principles such as universal design for learning, personalized support, and social integration. In summary, this study underscores the significance of inclusive education as a means of promoting equity, diversity, and social inclusion in the educational landscape. It provides a foundation for ongoing efforts to create more inclusive learning environments for differently-abled children, ensuring that they have the opportunity to thrive and reach their full potential.

Key words: Inclusive Education, Management, Challenges, Differntly abled children, Equitable Opportunities.

Introduction

Inclusive Education for Empowering Differently Abled Learners is essential to India's development as a developed country because it represents the combined efforts of educators, legislators, and parents of children with disabilities. The development of inclusive education policies that support equitable access, involvement, and achievement for all students is one way that policymakers contribute to the welfare



of differently abled children. Legislators establish policies by promoting inclusive practices in educational settings and providing funding for special education initiatives. Their dedication to include inclusive education into national frameworks for education is indicative of a more comprehensive understanding of social justice and fairness.

In order to make sure that their children's educational requirements are satisfied, parents of children with disabilities play a crucial role as supports and advocates by actively interacting with legislators and educators. Their participation in decision-making processes, ranging from school placements to Individualized Education Plans (IEPs), fortifies the collaboration between the home and the school, creating a nurturing atmosphere that improves academic performance and general well-being.

When taken as a whole, these initiatives improve inclusive education in India and open the door to a more developed, inclusive country where all people, regardless of aptitude, may make significant contributions to society.

Review of Literature

Inclusive education has emerged as one of the most significant educational reforms aimed at ensuring equal learning opportunities for all children, irrespective of their physical, intellectual, sensory, or emotional disabilities. Over the last two decades, researchers across the world have examined different dimensions of inclusive education, including teacher preparedness, parental involvement, policy implementation, institutional support, and the use of assistive technologies.

Genovesi (2022) conducted a systematic review of qualitative studies examining the experiences and perceptions of teachers, parents, and students regarding inclusive education for learners with developmental disabilities. The study concluded that successful implementation of inclusive education depends upon continuous professional development of teachers, adequate institutional support, and collaborative partnerships among schools, parents, and policymakers.

Similarly, **Cowley (2013)** emphasized the importance of assistive technologies in facilitating effective classroom participation of differently-abled learners. The



study highlighted that teacher training in educational technologies significantly improves learning outcomes and classroom engagement among children with disabilities.

Several researchers have investigated the transformation of regular classrooms into inclusive learning environments. **Rasanayagam and Alwis (2021)** observed that inclusive education cannot be achieved solely through policy formulation; rather, it requires coordinated efforts from governments, school administrators, teachers, parents, and the community. Their study stressed collaborative leadership and institutional commitment as essential prerequisites for successful inclusion.

Likewise, **Lagrasta (2020)** argued that school leadership plays a decisive role in creating an inclusive culture by ensuring teacher support, resource allocation, curriculum flexibility, and stakeholder participation. Effective educational leadership was found to positively influence teachers' willingness to adopt inclusive pedagogical practices.

Dash (2018) examined the implementation of inclusive education policies in India and reported that although various government initiatives have improved access to education for differently-abled children, challenges such as inadequate infrastructure, shortage of trained special educators, and limited awareness among parents continue to hinder effective implementation.

Earlier studies by **Usha and Thankam (2011)** and **Pather (2011)** also highlighted that inclusive education is a shared responsibility involving teachers, school management, parents, local communities, and policymakers. They emphasized that positive attitudes among stakeholders significantly contribute to successful inclusion of children with disabilities.

From the parents' perspective, **Brydges and Mkandawire (2018)** explored the experiences of parents whose children attended inclusive and special schools. The findings revealed mixed perceptions regarding inclusive education. While parents appreciated opportunities for social interaction and mainstream education, they expressed concerns about inadequate individualized attention, insufficient teacher preparedness, and lack of specialized learning resources.



Recent studies have increasingly focused on teachers' attitudes towards inclusion. **Sharma, Loreman and Macanawai (2016)** found that teachers with specialized training in inclusive education demonstrate significantly more positive attitudes and greater confidence in teaching students with disabilities than those without such training. Professional development was identified as a major determinant of successful inclusive practices.

Research has also highlighted the importance of parental involvement in inclusive education. **Ainscow (2020)** suggested that collaborative partnerships between schools and families improve educational planning, student participation, and overall learning outcomes. Active parental engagement contributes to better academic achievement, improved self-esteem, and greater social inclusion of differently-abled learners.

In the Indian context, implementation of the **Rights of Persons with Disabilities (RPwD) Act, 2016** and the **National Education Policy (NEP) 2020** has strengthened the legal and policy framework for inclusive education. However, several scholars have observed that effective implementation remains uneven across states due to limited financial resources, lack of trained teachers, inadequate accessibility, and insufficient awareness among stakeholders.

Overall, the literature suggests that successful inclusive education depends upon multiple interrelated factors including supportive government policies, trained teachers, accessible infrastructure, assistive technologies, effective school leadership, active parental participation, and positive societal attitudes. Although considerable progress has been made globally, empirical evidence from many parts of India, particularly North India, remains limited, indicating the need for further research.

Research Gap

Education to differently abled children is still in the state of evolution in North India. The literature on inclusive education is scant in cities of North India. The review the literature on inclusive education in India that the empirical research in this area has



been weak, as researchers have remained oblivious to the need for gathering empirical data.

Very often, we do not pay due attention towards the interests of differently abled children. We think, the differently abled children do not have any occupational interest. But this assumption is completely wrong. Differently abled children like all children have a wide range of interests that can vary based on their individual abilities and preference. It is important to recognize and support their unique interests and talents, just like any other child. Therefore, a considerable research is needed to bring out the perception of parents as well as teachers towards differently able children. There is a need to conduct more comprehensive research on the problems faced by the parents of differently abled children. People are not aware about recent government policies framed in this regard. There is a need to create awareness among the people regarding government policies and regulations.

Objectives

More specifically, the objectives of the study are :

- To identify the current status of inclusive education for differently abled children in North India;
- To analyse the role of government in providing inclusive education to differently-abled students.

Methodology of the Study

The present study adopts a descriptive and exploratory research design based entirely on secondary data. The descriptive approach has been used to examine the existing status of inclusive education for differently-abled children, while the exploratory approach facilitates understanding of the challenges, opportunities, and strategic interventions required for strengthening inclusive education in India.

Discussions

Current Landscape of Inclusive Education in India



Inclusive education in India has undergone a significant transformation over the past two decades through legislative reforms, policy initiatives, and judicial interventions aimed at ensuring equitable educational opportunities for children with disabilities. The enactment of the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education (RTE) Act, 2009, the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (RPwD) Act, 2016, and the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 has strengthened the country's commitment to promoting inclusive and equitable quality education (Government of India, 2009; Government of India, 2016; Ministry of Education, 2020).

Despite these progressive reforms, implementation remains inconsistent across states due to disparities in infrastructure, teacher preparedness, financial resources, and availability of support services (UNESCO, 2021; Dounge, 2022). While policy frameworks advocate the inclusion of children with disabilities in mainstream schools, many educational institutions continue to face challenges in providing accessible infrastructure, assistive technologies, and individualized instructional support (NCERT, 2022).

Statistical Overview

According to the UNESCO State of Education Report for India 2021, approximately 1.7% of children in India have disabilities. However, only about 61% of children aged 5–19 years with disabilities are attending educational institutions, indicating significant educational exclusion (UNESCO, 2021).

Studies further indicate considerable variation in school participation across disability categories. Children with autism spectrum disorder and multiple disabilities experience the lowest enrollment rates due to inadequate specialized support, whereas children with specific learning disabilities have comparatively better access to mainstream education (UNESCO, 2021; UNICEF India, 2021).

Current estimates indicate:

- Autism Spectrum Disorder – **27%**
- Intellectual Disabilities – **48%**
- Multiple Disabilities – **21%**



- Specific Learning Disabilities – 69% (UNESCO, 2021)

School Infrastructure and Accessibility

India has one of the largest school education systems globally, comprising nearly 1.5 million schools serving over 250 million learners (UDISE+, 2022–23). However, the availability of inclusive educational infrastructure remains limited.

Studies suggest that only a small proportion of schools possess adequate accessibility features such as ramps, accessible toilets, resource rooms, Braille learning materials, and assistive technologies (UNESCO, 2021; NCERT, 2022). Government initiatives under Samagra Shiksha have improved accessibility, yet rural schools continue to face significant infrastructural constraints (Department of School Education & Literacy, 2023).

Current estimates indicate:

- Schools implementing comprehensive inclusive education programmes – 4.5%
- Special schools – 0.8%
- Schools with partial inclusive facilities – 6.7%
- Schools lacking adequate inclusive facilities – 88% (UNESCO, 2021)

Mainstream Schools

Inclusive education in India primarily operates through mainstream schools where children with disabilities learn alongside their non-disabled peers. Although this model promotes social inclusion, implementation remains constrained by large class sizes and limited teacher preparation.

The average teacher-student ratio in mainstream schools is approximately 1:35, making individualized instruction difficult (UDISE+, 2022–23). Several studies report that many teachers have positive attitudes towards inclusion but lack adequate



professional training in differentiated instruction, classroom management, and assistive technologies (Sharma *et al.*, 2018; DOUNGEL, 2022).

National Institute of Open Schooling (NIOS)

The National Institute of Open Schooling (NIOS) has emerged as an important alternative educational pathway for children with disabilities.

Currently,

- Annual enrollment exceeds 400,000 students
- More than 25,000 learners with special educational needs
- Success rate of nearly 72% among learners with learning disabilities (NIOS, 2024)

NIOS offers flexible curriculum design, customized examinations, home-based learning opportunities, and provisions such as scribes and extended examination time, thereby enhancing educational accessibility (NIOS, 2024).

Special Schools

Special schools continue to provide specialized educational and therapeutic services for children requiring intensive support.

India has approximately 3,000 special schools, most operated by government agencies and non-governmental organizations (Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities, 2023).

These schools provide:

- Lower teacher-student ratios (1:8–1:12)
- Individualized educational programmes
- Speech therapy
- Occupational therapy
- Physiotherapy
- Braille and sign language instruction



However, researchers argue that dependence on special schools may limit opportunities for social integration and inclusive participation (UNESCO, 2021; Ainscow, 2020).

Government Initiatives

Several national programmes have strengthened inclusive education in India.

Samagra Shiksha provides financial assistance for:

- Resource teachers
- Assistive devices
- Barrier-free infrastructure
- Transportation
- Home-based education
- Braille and large-print textbooks
- Therapeutic support

(Department of School Education & Literacy, 2023)

Similarly, the National Education Policy 2020 emphasizes Universal Design for Learning (UDL), flexible curriculum, assistive technologies, resource centres, teacher training, and equitable educational opportunities for Children with Special Needs (Ministry of Education, 2020).

Teacher Preparedness

Teacher competence remains one of the strongest predictors of successful inclusive education. Research consistently indicates that teachers receiving specialized training demonstrate significantly more positive attitudes toward inclusion and greater instructional confidence (Sharma et al., 2018; Genovesi, 2022). Nevertheless, India continues to experience shortages of special educators, psychologists, counsellors, and rehabilitation professionals (NCERT, 2022).

Technology and Inclusive Education



Digital technologies are increasingly supporting inclusive education through accessible e-content, Braille-enabled software, Indian Sign Language resources, AI-assisted learning platforms, and teacher training programmes.

Government initiatives such as DIKSHA, PM eVidya, and accessible digital learning resources have expanded educational opportunities for learners with disabilities (Ministry of Education, 2023). However, unequal digital access and limited technological capacity continue to affect implementation, particularly in rural areas (UNESCO, 2021).

Conclusion

The present study highlights that inclusive education has become a central component of India's educational reforms, reflecting the nation's commitment to providing equitable learning opportunities for all children, irrespective of their disabilities. Legislative measures such as the Right to Education Act (2009), the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act (2016), and the National Education Policy (2020) have significantly strengthened the legal and policy framework for promoting inclusive education. Government initiatives including Samagra Shiksha, PM eVidya, DIKSHA, and the National Institute of Open Schooling (NIOS) have further expanded educational opportunities through financial assistance, assistive technologies, digital learning platforms, resource teachers, and accessible infrastructure.

Despite these noteworthy developments, the study reveals that the implementation of inclusive education remains inconsistent across the country. Several challenges continue to impede effective inclusion, including inadequate school infrastructure, shortage of trained special educators, limited teacher preparedness, insufficient assistive technologies, inadequate funding, and varying levels of awareness among parents and communities. Rural and economically disadvantaged regions continue to experience greater barriers in ensuring meaningful participation of children with disabilities in mainstream education.

The study concludes that India has made substantial progress in establishing a comprehensive policy framework for inclusive education; however, greater emphasis



must now be placed on effective implementation. Strengthening teacher education programmes, increasing financial investment, expanding accessible infrastructure, integrating assistive technologies, promoting community awareness, and establishing robust monitoring mechanisms are essential for realizing the objectives of inclusive education. A strategic and collaborative approach involving all stakeholders will enable India to move closer to achieving Sustainable Development Goal 4, ensuring inclusive, equitable, and quality education for every learner.

Future research should focus on empirical investigations involving teachers, parents, school administrators, and differently-abled students across various regions of India to examine the effectiveness of existing inclusive education practices and to develop context-specific strategies for improving educational outcomes.

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