



A Systematic Review on Inclusive Education Research: Identifying Concerns over Children with Disabilities

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Authors' contributions

This work was carried out in collaboration among all authors. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

Article Information

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.9734/ajess/2024/v50i71458>

Open Peer Review History:

This journal follows the Advanced Open Peer Review policy. Identity of the Reviewers, Editor(s) and additional Reviewers, peer review comments, different versions of the manuscript, comments of the editors, etc are available here: <https://www.sdiarticle5.com/review-history/116948>

Review Article

Received: 08/04/2024

Accepted: 11/06/2024

Published: 15/06/2024

ABSTRACT

India is committed to the SDG 4 to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education for all. Equity and inclusion serve as the critical parameters to ensure education for all. This systematic study aims to understand challenges related to inclusive education considering educational provisions, accessibility, academic intervention and psycho-social behaviour in context of India. Studies published between 2011 and 2020 were searched through databases such as SAGE publications, Taylor and Francis, Scopus, J Store, Springer and Google Scholar. Systematic review of 29 relevant articles was done out of 103 articles. The included articles were all empirical studies conducted in India. The results of the study reveal that though India has taken an interest in the

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Cite as: Kumari, Manisha, Shankar Lal Bika, and Harihara Bhesera. 2024. "A Systematic Review on Inclusive Education Research: Identifying Concerns over Children With Disabilities". *Asian Journal of Education and Social Studies* 50 (7):230-38. <https://doi.org/10.9734/ajess/2024/v50i71458>.

education of children with disabilities, numerous challenges ultimately affect their learning and development. Lack of infrastructural facilities, narrow curriculum and irrelevant pedagogy, dearth of specially-trained teachers, defective evaluation procedures, stereotype thoughts, and attitudinal differences of parents, teachers, and peers are the critical factors. This study recommends appointment of specially-trained and competent teachers, adoption of universal design for learning, implementation of effective instructional strategies, methods, and materials, introduction of constructivist evaluation procedures, parent counseling, awareness campaign, financial support for students and families, and encouragement of inclusion research in education as the applicable measures for the successful implementation of inclusive education in India.

Keywords: Children with disabilities; inclusive education; India.

1. INTRODUCTION

The development of a nation is determined by its quality of education. A country can progress if its citizens are well-educated and possess all the qualities of the fittest survivors. Education is considered a powerful instrument for transforming society; it is the finest means of socio-economic advancement. Education acts as a boon in leading any country to progress. If the people of a country are well-educated and well-informed, they can make the right decisions and emerge as responsible citizens of their respective countries. At present, almost every country is trying to strengthen the pillars of their education system deliberately so that they could be able to ensure the quality education of their citizens. India is a large country with a population of 1.38 billion. There we find rich diversities in culture, language, caste, religion, customs, and rituals. Due to this diverse nature and diversity, it becomes even more important that its education system might be implemented to lead its citizens to grow and learn uniformly. Since independence, India has made many efforts in the field of education to provide a better quality of education and learning experiences to all citizens irrespective of caste, color, creed, gender, disability, etc [1]. Among these diversities, inclusiveness in education is essential (Antil, 2014). Despite taking so many initiatives to ensure education is a fundamental right, people from marginalized sections of society, such as children with additional needs, remain deprived of such privilege due to segregation and discrimination (Jairam, 2018).

Moreover, children with special needs remain detached from getting an education in the mainstream. The census of 2011 shows that there are 2.68 crore people in India suffering from different disabilities (Tuli, 2019) [2]. To provide quality education to children, the concept of inclusive education is introduced, having a

vision of equality, equity, and justice. The idea of inclusive education has been derived from the term inclusion [3]. Inclusion is an educational approach and philosophy that ensures more incredible opportunities for all learners' academic and social achievement (Singh, 2014) [4]. Inclusion believes in regular treatment for special-needs children (Chaudhary, 2017). Inclusive education is a process based on inclusion that allows children with special needs to acquire a learning experience in a regular school environment with other children. Inclusion binds people in an integral and mutual relationship that ultimately leads to equality (Sharma, 2018) [5,6,7]. Moreover, it is a philosophy emphasizing equity, justice, and quality education for all children, especially those precluded from the mainstream due to disability (Kaushik, 2016). Inclusive education is the most relevant approach to learning to meet the diverse needs of all learners in the regular classroom environment. Inclusive education is an approach by which children with special needs, instead of a special school, are taught in a regular classroom according to their level of disabilities, weaknesses, and strengths (Ahmed, 2015).

2. CONCEPTUAL UNDERPINNING

Every child is special and unique, and education is the fundamental right of every child. Any diversity or difference can never stop anyone from getting an education. During the last few decades, inclusive education has become quite relevant in the educational scenario. As it is well known to all, individual differences exist everywhere. Children with diverse natures can be found in a classroom setting. Children differ in learning pace, and their learning styles may also vary; educating all learners is called inclusive education. Inclusive education is a process and a program that provides a barrier-free environment and allows children with diversified characteristics, abilities, interests, needs,

learning styles, skills, etc., to learn, create and contribute together. Inclusive education mainstreams children with disabilities in regular school and children without disabilities (Sharma, 2018). Inclusive education allows all learners, irrespective of caste, color, creed, religion, sex, or disability, to get an education and ensure their growth. Inclusive education is a process that aims at providing an opportunity for all learners to meet their diverse needs by overcoming all the obstacles affecting the learning environment [8]. It plays a vital role in developing a feeling of belongingness among the CWSN and allows them to feel segregated from others. Inclusive education is an approach to learning that mainly focuses on different spectrums of diversity within a typical classroom setting [9].

Inclusive education appears essential for bringing children with disabilities into the mainstream, where they could get a barrier-free environment to learn, social acceptance, and equal chances to grow and gain learning experiences [10,11,12]. There was a different time when people considered that only having a sympathetic attitude toward children with disabilities was enough. This perception itself develops a feeling of segregation. However, nowadays, it is realized that children with disabilities have the right to equal opportunities and assistance to learn and grow to their best level. They need equal opportunity and participation in their development (Tuli, 2019). Inclusive education is based on the philosophy of inclusion, which deals with leading children from a more restrictive environment to a least restrictive one where they can collaborate and learn fully and freely and attain desired changes in their personality. Inclusive education occurs when all learners, despite the difficulty, get an education in a mainstream educational setup (Goel, 2020). It supports a democratic environment where no place exists for inequality and injustice. This approach provides a barrier-free environment where students can realize their worth and use their potential best. Inclusive education is an educational approach that concentrates on bringing the strengths of children with special needs and minimizing their challenges by educating them in a better educational setting (Chaudary, 2017).

India has a long history of struggle and sacrifices. Many oppressed the country, including the British and Indian orthodox people [13,14,15,16]. There was a time when the privilege of getting an education was not meant

for everyone, as it was only confined to a few people [17]. However, in due course of time, things got changed. During the pre-independence period, no doubt, the British government made efforts to provide education to all. Whereas in the post-independence era, the Indian government made numerous efforts with innovative policies and programs to provide quality education to all citizens of the country, still, there was a section of society which is deprived of getting an education as they were segregated from the others [18,19,20,21]. They have been segregated from the earliest period. People are kept out of the fundamental rights of education and livelihood only due to certain disabilities or conditions; technically deviate from those without disabilities [22]. Meanwhile, in the second half of the 19th century, several progressive people started thinking about educating and looking after the hidden potentialities and social justice. The children with disabilities were then exposed to certain educational endeavors for their potential growth and development.

3. REVIEW OF RESEARCH INTO INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

In India, special education was the first and foremost approach adopted for the education and rehabilitation of children with disabilities. Its primary focus was to meet the various needs of exceptional children, mainly concerned with the rehabilitation and education of the children. It was the time when were kept highly marginalized. They were the victim of discrimination based on their disability conditions as the people considered them invaluable to society (Dray, 2008). In India, the concept of special education was introduced in the late 19th century. In 1883, India witnessed the advent of the special education system when the first school for the deaf was established in Bombay. In addition, in 1887, the first school for blind children was set up in Amritsar. This was the beginning of a way to educate children with disabilities [23]. Though the process was somewhat slow due to the people's negligence, it still played a vital role in grabbing society's attention toward empowering children with disabilities by providing them with educational opportunities. At the time of the country's independence, 35 schools for children with hearing impairment children, 32 schools for blind children, and three for children with mental retardation were established. After independence, the Indian government focused

on the education of children with disabilities; by 1980, the number of schools for the deaf and blind increased. There were 400 schools for the visually impaired, 200 for the mentally disabled, and 900 for the hearing impaired (Pandey, 2006). Through the establishment of these separate schools, the doors for educating these children were opened.

Integrated education was another approach to educating children with disabilities. It was different from the special education approach. In the special education system, there were separate schools for children with disabilities where they get an education. This approach helped join children with disabilities in the mainstream education system. In an integrated approach, the children with special needs attend regular school in separate classrooms. This approach was introduced to develop a sense of social acceptance among children with disabilities. Integrated education was mainly an effort to integrate children with special needs into the regular school system. The concept of integrated education was introduced in mid of 20th century to reform the segregated school system (Ghosh, 2017). The Royal Commonwealth Society of Blind and the Christopher Blind Mission first took the first step towards this integrated approach by initiating an experiment. The government also implemented this approach by launching a comprehensive scholarship scheme under the Ministry of Education in 1952. Following this approach, the Planning Commission added a program for integrated education in 1971. In 1974, the Integrated Education for Disabled Children (IEDC) scheme was launched to integrate children with disabilities into mainstream classrooms by providing financial support, transportation services, and many others. The National Policy of Education NPE 1986 also emphasized promoting equal opportunities and participation in promoting integrated education. The Programme of Action, launched in 1992, also focused on integrating children with disabilities in regular schools addressing that a disabled child who can get an education in a regular school should not be part of the special school [24]. NCERT and UNICEF jointly launched the PIED Project Integrated Education for Children with disabilities in 1987 to integrate those children into regular classrooms. Integrated education was crucial in introducing children with disabilities to the mainstream, whose education was only confined to a separate school system. Though it has not been entirely

successful in joining children with disabilities with the mainstream, it still helped create more awareness among people regarding the education of these children.

Finally, inclusive education is another fundamental approach to educating children with special needs. It is different from the special and integrated approaches. Inclusive education is based on the idea of inclusion. Inclusion means embracing everyone irrespective of caste, color, creed, sex, and disability. Inclusion deals with an approach that allows children with special needs to get an education in the regular school environment. It provides them with a barrier-free environment where they can be a full-time part of a regular classroom with children without disabilities (Ghosh, 2017). Inclusion is an ethical practice that needs to be followed which ensures the quality education of those children who are marginalized or excluded due to having some disability in an innovative classroom environment [24]. The roots of inclusive education can be traced from the World Conference on Special Needs Education in June 1994, which was held in Salamanca, Spain. It was a worldwide conference in which a total of 25 international organizations and 92 governments, including India, participated. The term inclusion was embraced at the conference, and the principle of inclusive education was adopted (Kaushik, 2016). A universal framework for action to provide equal opportunities and education to all and to give the education of children having disabilities or any backwardness a more comprehensive look following inclusive practice was adopted [17]. It was based on a guiding principle that all children, regardless of physical, intellectual, social, linguistic, emotional, or other conditions, should attend regular school with broader opportunities. After adopting this principle, international organizations deliberately focus on promoting inclusive education to construct an equitable and inclusive society. In India, Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA), launched in 2001, was the most significant milestone in inclusive education. This governmental initiative aimed at the universalization of elementary education was based on universal access, enrolment, and retention of every child who attends the age of 6-14 years. National Curriculum Framework (NCF) 2005 has also stressed inclusive education (Singh, 2014). Inclusive education is a process and program that allows each child to learn and create learning experiences, regardless of disability, in a regular classroom with other children under one

roof. This approach to education provides the least restrictive environment for all learners to carry out various activities that ultimately lead to quality learning.

4. PROBLEM STATEMENT

Inclusive education is indispensable for establishing a barrier-free environment and system of education for children with disabilities. This approach has been designed to accommodate and adapt children with and without disabilities in a single platform, which is also the need of the hour. The history of inclusive education in India shows right from the beginning that the Indian government has taken various initiatives from time to time to bring inclusion into the education system. However, the ground reality shows a credibility gap between the efforts and implementation [25]. In a country like India, which has a large population with distinctive culture, belief system, customs, language, geographical area, and conditions like disabilities, it becomes challenging to bring learners all together at a glance. Due to these diversities, the practice of inclusive education always remains challenging. It is a matter of discussion that the philosophy and practice of inclusion depict that every learner, irrespective of any disability or learning difficulty, has an equal right to get an education in a regular classroom with persons without disabilities. The implementation of inclusion is one of the contemporary issues of India's education scenario. However, the practice of inclusion might become possible if the country's people understand the significance of inclusion and inclusive education. The more we become aware of it, the better we practice and implement it. Currently, numerous studies and research have been conducted on inclusive education. To have better conceptual clarity and to analyze the central focus of Indian researchers concerning inclusive education, it would be very beneficial to review the Indian research on inclusive education.

4.1 Objectives of the Study

1. To understand challenges related to inclusive education concerning the following factors;
 - (a) Educational provisions
 - (b) Accessibility
 - (c) Academic interventions
 - (d) Psycho-social behaviour
- 2.

3. To synthesize the measures for inclusive developmental practices in India.

5. METHODOLOGY

This study employed a systematic review method to understand and analyzed the inclusive education research in India. Studies published between 2011 and 2020 were searched through databases such as SAGE publications, Taylor and Francis, Scopus, J Store, Springer and Google Scholar. A total of 103 articles were located, out of which 29 articles are found relevant for this study. A brief description of literature search and screening strategy as well as inclusion and exclusion criteria is given below.

5.1 Literature Search and Screening Strategy

The literature search was done to understand challenges related to inclusive education considering educational provisions, accessibility, academic interventions and psycho-social behaviour. The search string used for this purpose were "inclusion," "inclusive education," "factors of inclusive education," "inclusive education research," "inclusive education challenges," "children with disabilities," and "education of children with disabilities." The search was performed through databases such as SAGE publications, Taylor and Francis, Scopus, J Store, Springer and Google Scholar in context of India. In addition, abstracts of 103 papers were studied and examined to retain relevant studies for this paper. After screening, 29 selected articles were considered for compilation and review.

5.2 Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

The review included studies published between 2011 and 2020, during the previous decade. The studies included were all conducted in India. The studies included in this study were all peer-reviewed. The included studies were relevant to the objectives of this paper. The studies which were not relevant to the objectives of the study were excluded. The studies which do not based on India were excluded.

6. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

After the extensive reviews, the authors have pointed out some key areas concerning inclusive education that need to be focused are discussed

in the following lines. There is a dire need for inclusive education in the country of India. Antil [26] supports that inclusive education is a medium through which the least restrictive environment can be provided to students regardless of disability. The 'one size fits all classroom approach for inclusive education is the need of the hour. Therefore, it is necessary to implement the philosophy of inclusion in the mainstream education system. From the study of Christopher, S. & Chandrasekar, P. [27] it can be understood that inclusive education positively impacts the academic and social achievement of students with special needs and develops various qualities among students without special needs. No two individuals are alike; every individual, along with strengths, has weaknesses. This does not mean that someone with some weakness must remain deprived of an education. Even the Indian constitution emphasized the principles of equality and justice. To meet the needs of all learners, regardless of disability, have the equal right to get an education and empower themselves. Another major finding deduced by the authors is that no doubt the government of India has devoted services to inclusive educational programs; the role of media is also indispensable [28,29,30]. A study conducted by Ghosh (2017) reveals that the media has made its possible effort to ensure that children with special needs are accepted by society with open consent and positive thinking. The Amir Khan starrer movie 'Taare Zameen Par' and the famous daily soap 'Aapki Antra' are clear examples that show that the media has tried to develop a positive perception among people regarding the concept of disability.

A study (Goel, 2020) shows that teacher plays a significant role in inclusion education. S/he can make the teaching-learning process easy by properly utilizing time, resources, and energy. In a study, by using flexible learning strategies, methods, and material, the teacher can brilliantly handle learners with diversified needs and help them meet their needs within a regular classroom setting (Singh, 2014). Along with using appropriate strategies, the attitude of teachers toward students with disabilities also plays a vital role in the successful practice of inclusion [31]. Christopher, S. & Chandrasekar, P. [27] undertook a study that supports inclusion practices under SSA positively impacting students with and without special needs.

Mahapatra, S. K. [32], in a study, suggested that using different ICT resources to teach children

with disabilities in an inclusive classroom is quite beneficial. ICT as an academic intervention can significantly make education for children with disabilities a smooth and more exciting process. There is a higher success rate of accessibility in elementary education compared to higher education. Children with disabilities at a higher stage have to face various challenges which hinder the proper implementation of the practice of inclusion. Alam, S. (2016) reported that a single model could only be suitable for some children in an inclusive setting. The teacher must use various teaching strategies following the individual difference in the classroom. Despite various challenges, a favorable outcome has been seen in the practice of an inclusive education system. Christopher, S. & Chandrasekar, P. [27] in a study revealed that the practice of inclusive education in public schools brought positive outcomes in terms of increasing the social and academic achievement of exceptional children and also the development of values like tolerance, patience, better social interaction, healthy interpersonal relationships among children with or without disabilities. Children with disabilities in an inclusive setting get unobstructed exposure where they can learn freely and fully and feel socially accepted and considered an integral part of society. The inclusive environment positively affects their education, ultimately leading to long-lasting learning.

Another important thing that the authors discovered upon which the study's objective is that despite the various governmental efforts, inclusive education is still going through numerous hurdles. For the success of an inclusive education program, research and discussions are highly essential [33]. Different studies have shown that issues and challenges in inclusive education are still prevalent, and different researchers have highlighted different challenges. The significant issues can be seen in the four dimensions of inclusive education, i.e., Accessibility, Academic intervention, Educational provisions, and the Psycho-social behavior.

- The major issues concerning accessibility in inclusive education are the lack of infrastructural facilities, non-attentiveness of institutional staff, unavailability of resources, narrow curriculum, and improper implementation of strategies [34,35]
- Challenges prevailing in inclusive education regarding educational provisions

are improper implementation of policies and programs, inactive involvement of stakeholders, the lethargy of policymakers in reaching every aspect, and lack of proper monitoring [36,37]. Challenges concerning academic intervention involve a narrow curriculum, lack of educational resources, unavailability of trained teachers, lack of training programs for educators, and defective evaluation procedures [38-40].

- The significant challenges related to psycho-social behavior on inclusive education are stereotypical thinking of people, negative assumptions, gender discrimination, wrong perceptions of parents regarding disability, and attitudinal differences among peers [41-43].

Hence, to ensure the full participation of children with disabilities in a regular school setup, overcoming the challenges across inclusive education in the country is essential. After analyzing the review studies, the authors have outlined some of the measures, such as the appointment of trained teachers, competency development of teachers, adoption of universal design for instructions, implementation of effective instructional strategies, methods, and materials, the introduction of constructivist evaluation procedures, parent counseling, proper monitoring, promotion of positive behavior among peers, an awareness campaign to eradicate negative perceptions and stereotype thinking regarding disabilities, financial support for students and families, encouragement of research in inclusive education [44-46]. These measures are highly applicable to implementing inclusive education in India.

7. CONCLUSION

Inclusive education is supposed to be instrumental in establishing an equitable society. After extensive reviews, it can be concluded that inclusive education is an effective alternative for making education universal for all under one umbrella. In a developing country like India, where we find vast diversity across cultures, languages, customs, and habitation, there is a dire need to make its education system based on the philosophy of inclusion. It acts as a powerful agent in bringing desirable changes in society and leading the country toward sustainability. Each child is unique, and he or she has an equal

right to get an education in the mainstream classroom despite any disability or diversity [47]. Inclusive education ensures that the disability of anyone should not become his/her helplessness. Though many steps have been taken since the beginning of the inclusive education program still, various challenges act as a hurdle to the successful practice of inclusion in India. To make education an equal opportunity for all, overcoming the prevalent issues and challenges is very much necessary. The dream of an integrated and developed society can come true only if its citizens are well educated, actively involved in discharging their duties towards their society, and share equal rights and opportunities. The stress should be given to empowering the children with disabilities rather than looking at them as a matter of charity.

DISCLAIMER (ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE)

Author(s) hereby declare that NO generative AI technologies such as Large Language Models (ChatGPT, COPILOT, etc) and text-to-image generators have been used during writing or editing of manuscripts.

COMPETING INTERESTS

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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