

REIMAGINING EDUCATION: STRATEGIES FOR INTEGRATING CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES INTO MAINSTREAM CLASSROOMS:

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Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi**ABSTRACT:**

Despite the fact that education is a fundamental right, systemic obstacles frequently prevent children with disabilities from receiving high-quality instruction in regular classrooms. By guaranteeing that all students, irrespective of their abilities, learn together in the same setting with the proper support, inclusive education aims to remove these obstacles. This paper makes the case that inclusive education promotes social equity, academic success, and emotional health in children with disabilities in addition to being a moral and legal requirement. However, a multifaceted, strategic approach that tackles the structural and attitudinal issues in educational systems is necessary for successful integration. The major goal of this study is to investigate and assess successful methods for integrating kids with impairments into regular classes. Examining how universal design for learning (UDL) may be used to develop adaptable curricula, how differentiated teaching can be used to accommodate a range of learning demands, and how assistive technology can improve accessibility are all part of this. The study also looks into how important teacher training programs are in giving teachers the tools they need to promote inclusive practices, and how family involvement and peer support networks may help create a friendly and inclusive school climate.

In addition, this paper critically examines the current obstacles to inclusive education implementation, such as social misunderstandings regarding disabilities, teacher readiness, policy enforcement shortcomings, and a lack of infrastructure. It makes the case that in order to achieve true inclusion, changing educational policies, instructional strategies, and school settings to meet the needs of students with disabilities is equally as important as placing them in regular classes. In order to promote sustainable implementation, this research emphasizes effective models of inclusion and offers policy suggestions based on worldwide case studies and best practices. Ultimately, this essay argues that by encouraging diversity, empathy, and cooperative learning, inclusive education benefits all students, not only those with disabilities. It demands a paradigm shift in education, one that places an emphasis on fairness, flexibility, and accessibility as fundamental tenets of instruction. By rethinking education from an inclusive perspective, society may make progress toward a more fair and just future where all children, regardless of aptitude, get the help and chances they need.

Keywords:

Inclusive Education, Universal Design for Learning, Differentiated Instruction, Assistive Technologies, Teacher Training, Social Equity, Educational Policy.

INTRODUCTION:

As the cornerstone of societal progress, economic prosperity, and personal development, education is a basic human right. However, throughout history, educational institutions throughout the world have ignored children with disabilities, either excluding them from regular classes or providing them with insufficient resources. A revolutionary strategy, inclusive education seeks to guarantee that all kids, regardless of ability, may study alongside one another in a flexible and encouraging setting. This method, which supports the full inclusion of children with disabilities in ordinary classes with their classmates who are usually developing, is based on the ideas of equality, social justice, and universal access (Singh, JD. 2016).

A novel strategy for educating children with disabilities and learning challenges alongside typically developing students is known as inclusive education (IE). All children's learning needs are addressed, with a focus on those who are most at risk of marginalisation and exclusion. It suggests that all learners—those with and those without disabilities—can study alongside one another by having access to common pre-school facilities, schools, and community educational settings with the necessary infrastructure of support services. Only an adaptable

educational system that takes into account the demands of a wide range of learners and changes itself to meet those needs can make this achievable (Mondal, Amitabha. (2021).

Inclusion is a value to uphold rather than an experiment to be evaluated. All children, regardless of whether they have disabilities, have a right to an education because they will eventually become citizens of the nation. It is unethical and impractical to subject children with special needs to research studies in which anything is being attempted to be tested or proven, especially when resources are insufficient simply to offer quality mainstream schools for common children (Gulyani, R. (2017).

The importance of inclusive education extends beyond academic achievement; it fosters social integration, reduces stigma, and promotes diversity within classrooms. By creating learning environments that accommodate a broad range of needs, inclusive education not only benefits children with disabilities but also enhances the overall educational experience for all students. It cultivates empathy, collaboration, and critical thinking—skills that are essential in an increasingly diverse and interconnected world. However, achieving truly inclusive education requires a systemic transformation of educational policies, teaching methodologies, curriculum design, and school infrastructure (Suja, GP & Elamaran, S. 2024).

Differentiated instruction is a fundamental approach to inclusive education that entails adapting instructional tactics and resources to accommodate a range of learning requirements. To guarantee that students with disabilities can successfully interact with the curriculum, teachers might use assistive technology, adapt lesson plans, and employ multimodal teaching strategies. In order to make learning accessible, curriculum customization is also essential. This enables students to go at their own speed while still getting the help they need (Jokinen, M. (2018). Successful integration of children with disabilities depends largely on the preparedness of teachers. Professional development programs should focus on equipping educators with the knowledge and skills needed to support students with varying disabilities. Training in inclusive pedagogy, behaviour management, and the use of assistive tools can enhance teachers' ability to create an inclusive classroom environment. Additionally, collaboration with special educators can provide valuable insights and strategies for addressing individual student needs (Seitz, S., Auer, P., & Bellacicco, R. (Eds.). (2023).

Fostering a pleasant learning experience requires a classroom that is inclusive and friendly. Student involvement may be greatly increased with little changes like visible timetables, peer support programs, and accessible seating configurations. It is also possible to lessen stigma and foster meaningful connections between kids with and without disabilities by fostering empathy and knowledge among peers. Respect should be emphasized in schools, where all pupils are treated with dignity and diversity is appreciated (Rogers, C. (2012).

Educational policies play a crucial role in ensuring the successful integration of children with disabilities. Governments and institutions should implement policies that guarantee adequate funding for inclusive education programs, accessibility measures, and specialized support services. Additionally, collaboration between schools, parents, and community organizations can create a strong support network that enhances the educational experience of disabled students. Parental involvement, in particular, helps bridge the gap between home and school, ensuring continuity in learning and emotional support (Urwick, J., & Elliott, J. (2010).

THE NEED FOR INCLUSIVE EDUCATION:

Millions of disabled children worldwide still encounter major obstacles to their education. Inclusionary education is a crucial tactic for guaranteeing that every child has access to high-quality education free from discrimination, according to UNESCO and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD). Conventional special education programs have come under fire for restricting academic prospects and fostering social isolation by placing disabled students in different classrooms or schools. Research shows that when kids with disabilities are incorporated into mainstream classes with the right kind of support, they do better both academically and socially. Inclusive education is not just a pedagogical approach but a legal and moral obligation. International frameworks such as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly Goal 4 (Quality Education), emphasize the need for inclusive and equitable education for all learners. Governments and educational institutions worldwide are increasingly recognizing the importance of adopting inclusive education policies. However, despite strong global advocacy, many educational systems remain unprepared to fully implement inclusive practices, largely due to structural, financial, and attitudinal challenges (Singal, N. 2006).

Everyone has the right to equality of status and opportunity, according to the Preamble of the Indian Constitution, which was adopted on November 26, 1949. The right to labour, an education, and access to public aid in some circumstances, such as disability, is supported by Article 41 of the Directive Principles of the Indian Constitution.

Additionally, Article 45 guarantees that all children up to the age of 14 will get a free and required education. As a result, the Constitution (86th Amendment) Act of 2002 was passed by the parliament, establishing all children between the ages of 6 and 14 as having a basic right to education. Additionally, the Lok Sabha passed the 93rd Amendment to the Indian Constitution (now known as the 86th), which mandates that the government provide free and compulsory education to "all children of the age of 6-14 years," with the preamble making it clear that this includes children with disabilities. Nevertheless, crucial loose ends of such enabling laws and policies ultimately remain untied (BHATTACHARYA, T. (2010).

1986's National Education Policy Future focus will be placed on distant and open learning systems to provide chances and access to all of the main target groups, notably the disadvantaged, including women, scheduled castes and scheduled tribes, the adult working class, and persons serving in the far-flung remote areas. The Rehabilitation Council of India Act, 1992 was approved by the Parliament in 1992, and it stipulates that all children with disabilities have a right to receive instruction from trained teachers and requires all special teachers to be registered with the council. In fact, it imposed penalties on teachers who engaged in the unlicensed education of special needs children. Individuals with Disabilities (Equal Opportunities, Protection of Rights, and Full Participation) Act of 1995 emphasizes the importance of giving all children access to free education in a suitable setting until they are 18 years old. It also highlights their entitlement to measures like (Namanyane, Tebatso & Shaoan, Md Mirajur Rhaman. (2021).

Access and participation by everyone issues were formally addressed initially by the Kothari Commission. A study was conducted to comprehend how accessible the educational system is for kids with disabilities (PWD). The findings showed that the schools had not taken the initiative and that the establishment of special schools was given more priority than inclusive education.

Every Indian citizen is guaranteed their own unique fundamental rights under the country's constitution, which is very adaptable and dynamic in character. The legislation is relevant to everyone, whether these people are healthy or have disabilities. It is acknowledged that people with disabilities are, at their core, people with the same essential human needs. The state policies of government that ensure that the constitution of India protects the human rights of every Indian citizen have already been discussed by Indian legislators. Every Indian citizen has the same right to participate in any social programme, International and governmental organizations have distinguished between the three main models of segregated, integrated, and inclusive special education. Human rights advocates, nonprofits, governmental organizations, governments, and international organisations all support inclusive special education as the most advantageous form of instruction for students with all levels of ability (Florian, L., & Black-Hawkins, K. (2011).

National Policy on Education (NPE) - 1986 The fundamental problem of equality was placed front and center by the NPE. The needs of the children with impairments are specifically addressed in Section 4.9 of the policy. The goal should be to include people who are physically and mentally challenged in society as equal partners, to prepare them for normal growth, and to provide them the tools they need to meet challenges head-on (Thomas, G. (2013).

All children between the ages of 6 and 14 are entitled to free and obligatory entrance, attendance, and completion of basic school under the Right to Free and Compulsory Education Act of 2009, which provides a reasonable legal foundation. It guarantees kids the right to a high-quality education that is based on the values of equality and non-discrimination. Most significantly, it guarantees kids' rights to an education devoid of stress, worry, and dread (Nind, M. 2005).

All students should be able to learn at their highest potential in the conditions that teachers create. When creating a classroom that is completely inclusive, this might be very difficult. Students frequently exhibit a wide range of abilities, learning preferences, strategies of self-expression, and ways of interacting with their physical and social settings. Their capacities to concentrate and pay attention, remain still, understand and react to social cues, and regulate themselves in response to stimuli can vary greatly. It's not uncommon for a student's needs and limitations to only become apparent during specific school activities and interactions (Bădescu, G. (2012).

When teachers get familiar with the unique limitations and sensitivities of each of their students, they are frequently able to foresee circumstances that are likely to be particularly challenging or unduly stimulating. They can prevent problems before they arise by taking preventative measures to lessen a student's discomfort and so contribute to maintaining group unity. Teachers and parents can prepare a kid for a field trip by outlining what to expect and practising the activities the class will be doing. They can also attempt to make arrangements for a parent, caregiver, or other adult to be present with the kid if they believe that a special assembly or performance

might be too stimulating for the youngster. A relative of a very young child with sensory integration dysfunction was requested by the teachers to attend a music performance at a preschool or early primary school, for instance. Because there was a plan in place for her to exit the room quietly if she started to exhibit indications of concern, the youngster was able to attend the performance (Bemiller, M. (2019).

The fact of disparities, including differences in aptitude, is not denied or refuted by inclusive educational approaches. Instead, by educating children to view differing needs and supports as a commonplace feature of life, successful inclusion helps make diversified needs and supports seem less unusual or frightening. Therefore, inclusive education goes beyond simply enhancing access and opportunity for people whose impairments may otherwise limit them. Making a child's disabilities less prominent in how she sees herself and how she is perceived by others is another goal of this programme (Hutchinson, N. L., & Martin, A. K. (1999).

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY:

1. Universal Design for Learning (UDL): Developing flexible teaching methods that accommodate diverse learning styles.
2. Assistive Technologies: Utilizing tools and resources that enhance learning accessibility.
3. Teacher Training and Professional Development: Ensuring that educators are equipped with the knowledge and skills necessary to support inclusive practices.
4. Policy Recommendations: Identifying policy frameworks that can help implement and sustain inclusive education at local, national, and international levels.

UNIVERSAL DESIGN FOR LEARNING (UDL):

UDL is a framework for lesson preparation that was created by the Centre for Applied Special Technology (CAST) to assist instructors in creating inclusive lessons for a wide variety of students in their classes (CAST, 2014). UDL is the proactive use of pedagogical expertise, educational design principles, and technology to provide engaging and accessible learning environments for students with a range of needs (King-Sears, 2009). In particular, UDL introduces educators to three ideas for removing obstacles that are especially prevalent in a classroom setting, which are as follows (Meyer et al., 2014; CAST, 2014).

- Representation: It speaks about the adjustments that can be made to educational materials to make them more accessible to students with a diverse needs. This means that teachers need to learn how to deliver instructional materials in a way that is not limited to spoken or written communication, but rather can be represented through a range of modalities and methods, including websites, videos, images, and more.
- Action and Expression: It refers to different forms of communication for students with different needs. To put it more precisely, UDL mandates that teachers give students a range of ways to express and show what they have learned in order to go beyond conventional exams and papers and incorporate options that let students use their unique skills or capabilities.
- Engagement: It refers to methods that incorporate students with various requirements into the educational process. Teachers must explicitly use a variety of classroom tactics that empower students and engage them in the learning process by giving them choices, lowering anxiety, and rewarding effort.

The Competence Framework for Inclusive Teachers (CFIT), created by the significant European program "The Teacher Education for Inclusion," has recognized "inclusive" (Watkins & Donnelly, 2013). Therefore, CFIT should be incorporated into teacher professional development programs that train educators in the process of creating inclusive learning experiences (Silvia Baldiris Navarro, Panagiotis Zervas, Ramon Fabregat Gesa, & Demetrios G. Sampson. (2016).

DISABLE CHILDREN AND RITE TO EDUCATION IN KASHMIR:

Jammu and Kashmir a union territory in India, is a specific illustration of a state where disability research is basically nonexistent. According to the 2011 Census, twenty.86 million people in India overall were classified as having disabilities. "People with disabilities include those who have severe and persistent physical, mental, emotional, or sensory impairments that It, along with a number of barriers, may prevent their full and effective participation in the society on an equal footing with other members of their society," states the 2008 Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (Matonya, 2016) (Barnes, C. 1999).

In Jammu and Kashmir State, males with disabilities outnumber girls in the 6 to 11 age range. Children with disabilities are more prevalent in Kashmir than Jammu. Orthopedic problems are most common in disabled

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children aged 6 to 14 years. More females than boys attend formal schools of education than children with disabilities, which is a very low number. Additionally, there are fewer impaired students in grades 11–14 than there are in grades 6–11, according to data from the National Center for Education Statistics. When a result, as children with disabilities get older, their dropout rate in school increases. In Kashmir, there are more children with disabilities enrolled in school between the ages of 6 and 14 than in Jammu. Whatever their disability or academic challenge, children have a role to perform in society after school. The ideal way to prepare for an integrated existence is to get an early start in mainstream playgroups or nursery schools, followed by an education in regular schools and colleges. Children's education is intertwined with their everyday lives, not apart from them. With the right help, children with disabilities can and are being educated in regular classrooms. There are numerous methods for attaining it. Children with disabilities are entitled to group membership in the same ways as everyone else. That right is restricted by segregated schooling, which also reduces prospects for personal growth (Sultan, Iflah. (2018).

It is not necessary to separate or safeguard children who have special needs or learning challenges. The teacher's attitude is a critical factor that must be taken into consideration for the successful integration of impaired students in a regular school setting. A child with impairments must have a good teacher if they are to succeed. The success of special education programmes is significantly influenced by the teacher's attitude and capacity to assist the impaired children (Singh, S. (2018).

Psychologically disable persons get depressed in their education. Recently world has been battling the COVID pandemic and it also effected Kashmir. In the conversation that I had with the disable children in Kashmir there experience is written in the subsequent section:

I am Madihaa syed from Kashmir. I am facing hearing and speech disability. Although there is no availability of Sign language and the was little support in my school. But during covid I was completely dropped out from schooling. Neither my school nor my government could help me. Government started radio and tele classing, zoom and other online classes but I was not included. Thousands of students like me never got any sign language support or any other pictorial books to continue education. All the disasters mean stoppage of education for me. During , internet banned in Kashmir I am completely lost. I don't get connect with my sources of studies and friends. In 2019 for around 6 months phone SMS and internet was stopped I along with other students facing hearing and speech Disabilities got abandoned. During my start of educational career till completion of secondary level education I couldn't get 20 % support from school. As no sign language or proper technology support is available. Don't know how things will go whether I can gain knowledge pass exams and reach higher studies I can't say anything because things are not changing in J&K for children with Disabilities. Examination invigilators, ministerial staff in schools too are not sensitized about us.

According to a study for the rights of people with disabilities in numerous states, including Jammu and Kashmir, around 40% of disabled children plan to stop attending school as a result of the challenges they confront with online education in Covid-19 (MOHAN, P. (2010).

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY:

This study is significant because it contributes to the growing discourse on inclusive education by offering practical insights into its implementation. By analyzing successful case studies and identifying best practices, this research aims to provide educators, policymakers, and stakeholders with concrete strategies for making mainstream classrooms more adaptive and accessible. The findings will help bridge the gap between theory and practice, offering solutions that can be applied across different educational contexts (DAWN, R. (2014).

Moreover, this research underscores the broader societal impact of inclusive education. When children with disabilities are given equal learning opportunities, they gain the skills and confidence needed to contribute meaningfully to society. Inclusive education fosters a culture of equity, respect, and social cohesion, ultimately benefiting entire communities. By reimagining education through an inclusive lens, we can move toward a future where every child—regardless of ability—has the opportunity to learn, grow, and succeed (Vohra, N., Sharma, S., & Nair, N. (2020).

CONCLUSION

The integration of children with disabilities into mainstream classrooms is not just a policy mandate but a transformative movement toward a more inclusive and equitable education system. While challenges remain, strategic interventions in curriculum design, teacher training, resource allocation, and societal awareness can help

overcome these barriers. This paper argues that inclusive education is not only possible but necessary for building a just and progressive society. By prioritizing accessibility, flexibility, and equity, education systems can become truly inclusive, ensuring that no child is left behind.

Reimagining education to be inclusive of children with disabilities requires a collective effort from educators, policymakers, and society as a whole. By implementing differentiated instruction, enhancing teacher training, fostering an inclusive classroom culture, and ensuring policy support, mainstream education can truly become a space where all children, regardless of ability, have the opportunity to thrive. Creating an inclusive education system is not just a moral obligation but a step toward a more equitable and compassionate society.

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