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**INCLUSIVE EDUCATION: NEED OF THE HOUR**

**Dr Bilal R. Shah. Associate Prof.& Principal  
MANUU, CTE M.E.T Campus Baghat-e-Barzulla, Srinagar**

**Abstract**

*Inclusive Education (IE) aims to educate children with disabilities and learning difficulties alongside normal children. It brings all students, regardless of their strengths or weaknesses, into one classroom and community to maximise their potential. It promotes an inclusive and tolerant society. According to the UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 73 million primary school-aged children were out of school in 2010, down from 110 million in the mid-1990s (UIS). 80% of India's rural population lacks special schools. Many of these children are marginalised by poverty, gender, disability, and caste (MHRD 2009 statistics). How can inclusive education be achieved? How will an inclusive environment help disabled children? How can all children receive quality education? Central and state governments must manage inclusive classrooms to meet the needs of all children in every community. This article discusses inclusive education in India, including its importance, challenges, and implementation measures.*

**Key Words: Inclusive Education, Children with special needs, Disabilities, Inclusion**

**INTRODUCTION**

Inclusive education addresses the learning needs of differently-abled children. In the last 50 years, the Indian government has worked to educate disabled children. In 1974, Integrated Education for Disabled Children (IEDC) was introduced to provide equal opportunities to children with disabilities in general schools and facilitate their retention. The government's initiatives in inclusive education date back to 1986's National Educational Policy, which aimed to "integrate the handicapped with the general community at all levels as equal partners, prepare them for normal growth, and enable them to face life with courage and confidence." The 1990 World Declaration on Education for All boosted local efforts. The Rehabilitation Council of India Act 1992 created a programme to train professionals to help disabled students. The National Policy for Persons with Disability, 2006, clarifies how the state, civil society, and private sector must

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operate to ensure a dignified life for people with disabilities and support for their caregivers. The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education (2009) guarantees all children ages 6-14 free and compulsory education. For a disabled child's education, read Chapter V of the 1995 Persons with Disabilities Act. Chapter V of the PWD Act assures disabled children free education until age 18. To achieve Education for All (EFA) by 2010, the Indian government accelerated the new inclusive education scheme. Inclusion is an effort to include learners with disabilities, different languages and cultures, different homes and family lives, and different interests and learning styles. All children, regardless of strengths and weaknesses, are included in inclusive education. In India, inclusive education in regular schools has become a policy priority for children and adults with special needs.

In almost every country, inclusive education is a major issue. With the 1994 Salamanca Statement (UNESCO), many developing countries began reformulating their policies to include disabled students in mainstream schools. According to research, inclusive teachers

Settings collaborate more, spend more time planning, learn from one another, participate in more professional development activities, are more willing to change, and use more creative strategies to meet students' needs. As future citizens, all school-aged children, disabled or not, have the right to an education. Inclusion maximises the potential of most students, protects their rights, and is the preferred 21st-century educational approach. In almost every country, children and adults are being excluded from formal education altogether; some of those who go to school do not complete. They are gradually and deliberately pushed out of the school system because schools are not sensitive to their learning styles and backgrounds. In a gesture of sympathy some children are sorted out into categories and placed in separate special schools, away from their peers. This has led to the development of two separate systems of education within countries, regular and special education. However, in recent years the rationale for having two parallel national systems of education has been questioned and the foundations of 'special education' have begun to crumble. The thinking that has developed during the last 50 years in the disability field has had significant influences not only on special education but also on practice in inclusive education. Current thinking and knowledge demands that the responsibility for ALL learners should remain with the regular classroom teacher.

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Owing to lack of knowledge, educational access and technology, disabled children were initially treated as unwanted and segregated from other children. Later their education was carried out in special schools. In recent times there has been a shift towards having children with disabilities attend the same schools as non-disabled children. The educationists now feel that each child should be allowed to learn in his own way. The concept of inclusive education has been spelt out in the Salamanca statement and the framework for action on special needs education 1994. It states that all governments have been urged to "adopt as a matter of law or policy, the principle of inclusive education, enrolling all children in regular schools unless there are compelling reasons for doing otherwise". The basic premise is that the school should meet the educational needs of all children irrespective of their disabilities or limitations.

### **INCLUSIVE EDUCATION**

"World Conference on Special Needs Education: Access and Quality" (Salamanca Statement, Spain 1994) and the World Education Forum adopted the principle of inclusive education (Dakar, Senegal 2000). The Statement asks governments to make inclusive education a policy priority. Standard Rules on Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities supports inclusion. Proclaiming equality and participation. Inclusive Education (IE) addresses the diverse needs of all learners by reducing learning environment barriers. It means attending the child's local school with tailored support (UNICEF 2007). Inclusive education helps the education system reach all students. At the Jometin World Conference (1990) in Thailand, 'Education for All' goals were set and it was proclaimed that every person (child, youth, and adult) should have access to basic learning opportunities. Inclusion provides all students with greater academic and social success. This includes social, recreational, arts, sports, music, day care and afterschool care, extracurricular, and faith-based activities.

NCERT and UNICEF launched Project Integrated Education for Disabled Children (PIED) in India in 1987 to integrate learners with disabilities into regular schools. In recent years, inclusive education has expanded to include all disadvantaged students. This broader understanding of curriculum led to the development of the National Curriculum Framework (NCF-2005), which emphasises including and retaining all children in school through a programme that affirms each child's value and gives them dignity and confidence to learn.

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## INCLUSIVE EDUCATION BACKGROUND

India's constitution guarantees every child basic education. Since 1947, India's government has created many special education policies. Integrated Education for Disabled Children (IEDC) was a 1974 GOI initiative (NCERT, 2011). The Kothari Commission (1966) emphasized educating disabled children post-independence (Pandey 2006). In the 1980s, India's Ministry of Welfare recognized the need for an institution to monitor and regulate disability rehabilitation HRD programmes. In the 1990s, 90% of India's 40 million children with physical and mental disabilities were excluded from mainstream education. The National Policy on Education, 1986 (NPE, 1986), and the Programme of Action (1992) emphasise integrating children with special needs. In 1994–95, India's government implemented DPEP. In 1997, District Primary Education Programme adds inclusive education (DPEP).

This programme focused on integrating children with mild to moderate disabilities, in line with global trends, and was one of the GOI's largest flagship programmes at the time, with 40,000 million rupees (approximately 740 million US dollars). 2001's SarvaShikshaAbhiyan (SSA) aimed to universalize elementary education. Access, enrollment, and retention of 6-14-year-olds are important for UEE. SSA's zero-rejection policy ensures that every Child with Special Needs (CWSN), regardless of type, category, or degree of disability, receives a quality education. NCF 2005 outlines inclusive education. The Ministry of Human Resource Development implemented a National Action Plan for disabled children and youth in 2005. In 2009-10, IEDC was renamed "Inclusive Education of the Disabled at the Secondary Stage" (IEDSS) to help disabled children in secondary school. 2013's RashtriyaMadhyamikShikshaAbhiyan(RMSA). Integration into regular schools helps these children socialise and gain confidence.

## INCLUSIVE EDUCATION'S IMPORTANCE

International efforts have been made to mainstream disabled children. We must include special needs children in regular schools for truly inclusive education. These kids face learning and classroom participation barriers. Teachers realise the value of accepting each student as unique as general education classrooms become more diverse. Effective inclusive programmes adapt activities to include all students, despite different goals. Inclusive education helps all students succeed. Most students learn and perform better with a rich general education curriculum,

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research shows. Children do better academically in inclusive settings, and inclusion helps them build relationships. Friendships, social skills, personal principles, comfort with special needs, and caring classroom environments are benefits.

Friendships make people feel loved, safe, and cared for. Low-achieving students can get extra help in an inclusive setting even if they don't qualify for special education. In inclusive classrooms, classmates of students with disabilities gain social cognition and become more aware of others' needs. Because of their children's experiences, these parents feel more comfortable around people with special needs. Students with disabilities can form long-lasting friendships that would not be possible otherwise. These friendships can help them navigate social relationships later in life.

### **THE NEED OF INCLUSIVE EDUCATION**

There are numerous positive benefits of inclusions that assist both students with special needs and other students in the classroom. Research has demonstrated significant effects for students with disabilities in areas such as achieving individualised education programme (IEP) goals, enhancing communication and social skills, promoting positive peer connections, numerous educational results, and post-school adaptations. Favorable effects on non-disabled children include the development of positive attitudes and perceptions of people with disabilities and the improvement of their social status among non-disabled classmates.

There have been numerous research on the effects of including children with impairments in regular classrooms. A research on inclusion examined preschoolers who were both integrated and segregated (only receiving special education). The study found that children in integrated locations advanced in social skill development, but children in separated sites regressed.

- Universalization of Education: inclusive education contributes to our goal of achieving Universalization of education. The extension of education is only possible if the mental and physical health, needs, and other strengths of children are considered.
- To fulfill the constitutional obligation: In an effort to uphold the principle of equality, inclusive education grants every kid the right to attend the school of his/her choice, regardless of physical, psychological, or sociocultural differences.

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- Families can realise their aspirations of a normal life for their children.

Every parent desires for their children to be accepted by their peers, to have friends, and to live "normal" lives. This goal can become a reality for many children with disabilities in inclusive environments.

Children gain a favourable perspective of themselves and others.

When children attend classes that reflect the similarities and differences of people in the real world, they learn to value diversity. When children of different abilities and cultures play and learn together, respect and understanding increase.

- Development of Friendships Schools are crucial environments for children to form connections and acquire social skills. In inclusive classrooms, children with and without disabilities learn together and from one another.
- Children develop key academic skills. In inclusive classrooms, students with and without impairments are expected to master reading, writing, and mathematics. Children with impairments acquire academic skills through increased expectations and quality instruction.
- All children learn through interaction. Because the principle of inclusive education aims to aid the learning of all students, the entire class benefits. Within a supportive learning atmosphere, children learn at their own pace and in their own way.
- Children feel self-esteem. The mere fact that students with impairments attend classes in a regular education setting as opposed to a special education setting increases their self-esteem.
- Enhancement of their own self-perception. When non-disabled students participate in inclusive programming, their social cognition improves and they obtain a greater understanding and acceptance of children with disabilities and of diversity in general. Students without disabilities also report improved self-esteem and self-concept.

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**INDIA'S INCLUSIVE EDUCATION CHALLENGES**

In India, disabled people have complex problems, few resources, and damaging social attitudes. On the road to inclusive education, challenges and opportunities will arise. India's people are stratified along socio-economic and caste lines and speak many languages. India is the world's second-most populous country after China. It has 17% of the world's population and 20% of out-of-school children. Inclusion helps students. As schools accommodate students with diverse backgrounds and abilities, this has become more difficult. According to the 2011 Census of India (Government of India), 26 million Indians have disabilities, or 2.1% of the population. According to UNICEF's Report on the Status of Disability in India (2000), 30 million Indian children are disabled. 10% of the world's population is disabled, and 80% live in developing countries. India's disabled population is 75% rural. Since independence, the government has created many special education policies. Educating disabled children in regular classrooms can be difficult. Scarcity of human and material resources, negative attitudes of teachers, community, non-disabled peers, and parents may cause these problems. The Indian government has tried to create inclusive policies for people with disabilities, but their implementation has not led to an inclusive education system. Dropout rates are rising, especially in poor areas. Students must leave school to help their parents' poor finances. This increases child labour, which causes physical and mental disabilities. Negative teacher and parent attitudes and behaviour can hinder disabled children's learning. Most disabled people still lack equal access to mainstream education.

Large class sizes complicate inclusive education in India. Das, Kuyini, and Desai (2013) examined the skill levels of regular primary and secondary school teachers in Delhi, India in inclusive education settings. 70% of regular school teachers had neither special education training nor experience teaching disabled students. 87% of teachers lacked classroom support. 20 million of India's 200 million school-aged children (6–14) need special education, according to the Sixth All India Educational Survey (NCERT, 1998). While the national average for school enrollment is over 90%, less than 5% of disabled children are enrolled. Children with disabilities struggle with peer acceptance. Non-disabled children often tease and bully disabled children. Many disabled children live in poor families.

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Most school staff in India isn't trained to design and implement special education programmes in regular schools. Most Indian teacher training programmes don't include disability studies (Myreddi& Narayan, 2000). Few Indian schools are equipped to meet the needs of disabled students. Procuring and resourcing assistive devices presents challenges. Despite efforts for inclusive education in India, 94% of disabled children were not served. India shares some challenges with other developing countries, but it also has unique characteristics that will make educational reform difficult. The Indian government's commitment to UEE cannot be fulfilled without addressing the special needs of physically and mentally challenged children. Inclusion is a buzzword in education, but it's still cloudy.

### **FEW INCLUSION MEASURES**

Inclusive education helps disabled children feel like they've accomplished something. Einstein had learning disabilities but became the 20th century's greatest mind. Educating children with disabilities alongside non-disabled peers is one of India's best education methods (Shah, 2005, Shah et al., 2014). India's government must close education gaps to build an inclusive education system. So, India can improve Inclusive Education with these steps.

- All Indians must have RTE. State and central governments and all other social actors should recognise the importance of inclusive education that meets the needs of all learners.
- All schools and the Indian education system need an inclusion policy (NCF, 2005). Schools must become centres that prepare children for life and ensure that all children, especially differently abled, marginalised, and disadvantaged children, benefit from this critical area of education.
- Teachers should be prepared differently for rural special education programmes, whose goal is to integrate disabled people into their own environment and community.
- Flexible inclusive education system. Methods and materials must be flexible to give these children access to the regular curriculum.
- A school-based support team should develop strategies to meet the needs of SEN students. This team should help teachers with classroom issues.

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- The school must help children learn alongside their peers. An inclusive school must meet the needs of all children, especially those who face the most barriers to education.
  - Parents can participate in all child-related decisions. They're education partners. Parents who cooperate with teachers and schools are valuable resources.
  - Schools must make adjustments before integrating special-needs students. These children should have easier access to transportation. Architecturally, toilets should have ramps and wheelchair access.
  - Student-oriented components such as medical and educational assessment, books and stationery, uniforms, transport allowance, reader allowance and stipend for girls, support services, assistive devices, boarding the lodging facility, therapeutic services, teaching learning materials, etc. should be provided.
  - Differently abled children should be treated equally as normal children, and their talents and abilities should be recognised for their self-respect and society's welfare.
  - Audio learning or Braille textbooks should be available. Pure mathematical and logical tests may need to be removed from the exam system.
  - Teachers' attitudes toward inclusive education can be formed and developed in an educational system that provides good practise in this field.
  - Families without disabled children should help families with disabled children.
  - To effectively teach children with disabilities, general and special educators should receive two- to three-week in-service training.
  - Teachers in schools that accept children with special needs must attend workshops to adapt.
  - Periodic evaluation and updating of training programmes should be part of teacher preparation.
  - Class teachers shouldn't be responsible for inclusion. Everyone must be responsible. Teachers need ongoing training. It must change attitudes
  - Curriculum reform should be accompanied by teacher training on inclusion and its principles. Each of the above programmes' curricula should be developed by an expert group of special educators.

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**Role of the teacher**

To teach in inclusive settings, cooperation and understanding between regular, special and resource teacher is an essential condition. The teacher for teaching in inclusive classrooms must be aware of 3R's i.e., Rights, Roles and Responsibilities. Teacher in inclusive classrooms is expected to welcome all children, without any discrimination by making necessary arrangements for their education in the same school and classes along with the non-disabled peers. The general role and responsibilities of a teacher in inclusive settings can be summed up as under:

- Following the principle of 'zero rejection policy' according to which everyone should be welcomed in the class.
- Providing enhanced opportunities for overall development of child's physical, cognitive, emotional and social skills.
- Providing equal opportunities to each child to participate in classroom activities and school programmes according to his/her capability..
- Making disabled child emotionally, physically, psychologically and educationally sound.
- Coordinate weekly scheduled collaboration meetings with the regular education teachers to identify necessary accommodations.
- Develop, in collaboration with the regular education teacher, a plan for supervising the paraprofessional's duties.
- Monitor and evaluate assigned students' progress in regular education curriculum.
- Provide regular education teachers and paraprofessionals with information on disabilities, medical concerns, and equipment operations.
- Provide classrooms with disability awareness information, as requested.
- Suggest and/or coordinate peer mediators, peer tutors, or peer buddies, etc.
- Working closely with parents to inform them of their child's progress and suggest techniques to promote learning at home.
- Collaborate with regular education teachers and all related service personnel

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## Role of the parents

As it has been rightly said that a great school works with parents to meet their aspirations. Every parent want his/her child to be the best human being, and to satisfy the needs of the children to survive, school exists. Home is considered to be the first school of a child and parents to be the first teachers. The purpose of a school is only to polish what happens at home, to provide varied additional exposure that parents on their own will not be able to give their children. Parents should bear following points in mind to be among the facilitators of inclusive education:

- Parents have affectionate responsibility to show and share love, care, emotional feelings with their children.
- Parents are responsible to generate income and provide financial support for the child's living costs and related payments.
- Making sure of providing congenial environment to them at home.
- Parents may not feel shy in developing relationships with teachers and other related professionals.
- Parents need to be involved in their understanding of the school's philosophy.
- Parents need to enjoy and be excited about what their children are learning.
- Discussing with the teacher what needs to be changed in order to improve their child's learning in problematic area.
- To work in collaboration with teachers, therapists, clinicians and school authorities.
- Home discipline should not be repressive rather should be self imposed.
- Parents should play an integral role in assisting their child's learning.
- To have positive and joyful attitude towards thinking, learning and challenges.
- parents should not be obsessively close to their child

## CONCLUSION

Our school system has a significant problem with inclusiveness. It is also turning into a problem in a great number of other countries all around the planet. It would appear that we are making progress toward a world in which equality and accountability are prioritised. While a large number of people believe that inclusion is synonymous with equality, some hold the other view. These days, inclusive classrooms are becoming increasingly commonplace all around the world.

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Because the concept of inclusion is not going away anytime soon, it is essential for educators to get on board with it. We may increase its level of success by expanding our knowledge of the opportunities it presents for kids and maintaining an open mind regarding those opportunities. Because more children are being found to have impairments on a daily basis, it is imperative that educators receive proper training in how to assist pupils who have special needs. These students need our assistance as soon as possible. We believe that the students will experience the greatest amount of success if they are given the opportunity to learn in an atmosphere with the fewest possible constraints. The success of our task is significantly increased when we draw on resources from other sources. In our country, there are many inclusive classrooms that are operating at a high level of efficiency. Because there is always potential for improvement, it is imperative that we carry on conducting research on the subject and develop on the methods that we are now using. Acquiring more knowledge is going to be the key to our improved success. We can only hope that we will be able to assist as many pupils as possible in meeting the rigorous standards of today.

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