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Review Study of Inclusive Education in India (2000–2024)

Saroj

Research Scholar,
Education Department,
Government degree College Mant
Mathura,
Dr. Bhimrao Ambedkar University,
Agra (Uttar Pradesh, India)

Dr. Satyendra Singh

Assistant Professor,
Education Department,
Government Degree College,
Mant Mathura (Uttar Pradesh, India)

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Abstract:

Inclusive education in India has emerged as a significant educational reform to provide equal learning opportunities for all children, especially those with disabilities and special needs. This paper presents a comprehensive review of inclusive education practices, research, policies, and implementation in India between 2000 and 2024. While legislative initiatives such as the Right to Education Act (2009), the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act (2016), and various inclusive education schemes show positive intent, challenges persist in infrastructure, teacher training, community attitudes, and execution. The review also discusses research studies from 2000 to 2014, current developments from 2015 to 2024, and future suggestions to enhance inclusion in Indian schools. The study emphasizes the need for an inclusive pedagogical approach, community involvement, and stronger institutional mechanisms to ensure that education becomes truly inclusive and accessible.

Keywords: *Inclusive education, India, disability, RTE Act, RPWD Act, teacher training, equity, policy implementation*

1. Introduction:

Inclusive education refers to a philosophy and practice that embraces diversity in classrooms by ensuring access, participation, and achievement of all learners, particularly those who are marginalized or have disabilities. Globally, it became a major educational priority after the Salamanca Statement (1994), and in India, it gained momentum especially after the 2000s. India's journey toward inclusive education involves recognizing education as a fundamental right and adapting school systems to accommodate learners with varied needs. Despite efforts to integrate children with special needs (CWSN) into mainstream education, ground realities highlight the gaps between policy and practice.

This paper reviews the historical progress, major policies, research evidence, and present-day

scenario of inclusive education in India from 2000 to 2024.

2. Historical Context of Inclusive Education in India (2000–2014):

In the early 2000s, inclusive education was largely guided by schemes like the Integrated Education for Disabled Children (IEDC), which later evolved into the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA). SSA, launched in 2001, marked a shift by integrating inclusive education as one of its core components. In 2005, the National Policy on Education stressed inclusion, and inclusive pedagogy began gaining visibility in teacher education programs. Despite these developments, the implementation was fragmented. While enrolment numbers increased, meaningful inclusion often lacked in practice. Studies such as Singal (2006) and Das et al. (2013) revealed gaps in teacher preparation and resource allocation. Many schools remained ill-equipped to accommodate students with diverse needs.

3. Legislative Framework and Government Initiatives (2000–2024):

India's policy environment has seen several key developments:

- Right to Education (RTE) Act, 2009: Made education a fundamental right for children aged 6 to 14. It emphasized free and compulsory education and included provisions for children with disabilities.
- National Policy on Education (Draft 2020): Proposed school restructuring and inclusive curricula with focus on CWSN.
- Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016: Expanded the definition of disability and mandated inclusive education as a right. Schools were obligated to provide reasonable accommodation.
- Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan (2018): Unified SSA, RMSA, and teacher education with stronger focus on inclusive practices.
- NEP 2020 Implementation (2020–2024): Promoted inclusive curriculum, teacher capacity building, and accessible infrastructure.

4. Key Research Studies (2000–2014):

- Singal, N. (2006). Inclusive education in India: International concept, national interpretation. *International Journal of Disability, Development and Education*.
- Das, A., Kuyini, A. B., & Desai, I. (2013). Inclusive education in India: Are the teachers prepared? *International Journal of Special Education*, 28(1), 27–36.
- Sharma, U., & Deppeler, J. (2005). Integrated education in India: Challenges and prospects. *Asia Pacific Journal of Education*, 25(2), 193–206.
- NCERT. (2005–2013). *Position papers and annual reports*. National Council of Educational Research and Training.

5. Current Scenario of Inclusive Education (2015–2024):

From 2015 onwards, the Indian government emphasized measurable inclusion targets:

- Teacher Training: DIKSHA and NISHTHA platforms included inclusive modules.
- Assistive Technologies: Digital Braille tools, screen readers, and sign language training were introduced in selected government schools.

- Inclusion in NEP 2020: Reiterated inclusive education with focus on curriculum flexibility, mother tongue instruction, and universal access.

Yet challenges continue:

- Dropout rates among CWSN remain higher.
- Accessibility audits of schools show poor compliance with infrastructure guidelines.
- Social stigma continues in rural and semi-urban schools.

6. Challenges in Implementation:

Despite strong policies, several challenges persist:

- Infrastructure Deficits: Lack of ramps, separate toilets, or accessible classrooms.
- Teacher Readiness: Most pre-service training does not include hands-on inclusive pedagogy.
- Assessment Practices: Examinations are not adapted for CWSN.
- Data Gaps: National databases underreport disability types and enrolment.
- Attitudinal Barriers: Teachers and peers often lack awareness, leading to isolation of CWSN.

7. Suggestions and the Way Forward:

- Curriculum Flexibility: Need for individualized learning plans and Universal Design for Learning (UDL).
- Parent and Community Engagement: Sensitization programs to reduce stigma.
- Teacher Capacity Building: Mandatory in-service inclusive training for all educators.
- Technology Integration: Expand use of assistive tech in classrooms.
- Policy Accountability: Regular state-level monitoring and social audits.

8. Conclusion:

Inclusive education in India has moved beyond a theoretical ideal and into the domain of policy and partial implementation. Between 2000 and 2024, India has made significant progress in recognizing the rights of children with disabilities and designing inclusive systems. However, practical barriers still limit full inclusion. The future of inclusive education depends on holistic efforts that involve policy enforcement, teacher empowerment, community awareness, and accessible infrastructure. Only then can India fulfill its constitutional promise of education for all.

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