



## Inclusive Education and Emotional Competence of Differently Abled Students

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**Abstract:** Education is critical for expanding the life prospects of all children, including children with disabilities (CWDs). Inclusive, equitable, and empowering education systems can help build strong, inclusive, and equitable societies. This organic connection between education and society lies at the heart of creating change and achieving social justice. Inclusive education over the last decade has become a frequently used concept in international literature and has been accorded legitimacy through various international declarations. The concept of 'inclusive education' has become an international buzzword and has been adopted in the rhetoric of many countries across the globe. Inclusion is an effort to make sure that diverse learners, those with disabilities, and normal children get education together under a roof in the same compound and classroom, irrespective of their strengths and weaknesses. India is a diverse country that has traditionally valued differences. However, the country is also highly stratified socio-economically. Disability has been traditionally perceived as a serious handicap, a deviation from normality, resulting in discrimination and disadvantage. For decades, the education system has either disregarded or struggled with the idea of integrating children with disabilities into mainstream schools. Inclusion has, therefore, remained only a goal on paper. The Government of India has provided a comprehensive range of services for the education of children with disabilities over the past five decades. The policy on education in India has gradually placed a greater emphasis on children with special needs, and inclusive education in regular schools has become a primary policy goal.

**Keywords:** Inclusive Education • Equitable • Empowering Children • Disability • Policy • School • Discrimination.

### Introduction

As part of Agenda 2030, Sustainable Development Goal 4 aims to “ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all”. This objective implies that a school can only be inclusive when all its students can access its resources and participate in its activities without exception (UNESCO, 2019). It is important not to leave out children with disabilities. As Yell (2010) clarified the terms least restrictive environment, inclusion, and mainstreaming are often used interchangeably. They are not, however, synonymous concepts. The least restrictive environment (LRE) refers to the IDEA's (Katsiyannis, A et al., 2001). The Mandate is that students with disabilities should be educated to the maximum extent appropriate with peers without disabilities. The LRE mandate ensures that schools educate students with disabilities in integrated

settings, alongside students with and without disabilities, to the maximum extent appropriate. The least restrictive environment is not a particular setting (Yell, M L, 2016). Inclusive Education denotes that all children, irrespective of their strengths and weaknesses, will be part of mainstream education. It is clear that education policy in India has gradually increased the focus on children and adults with special needs, and that inclusive education in regular schools has become a primary policy objective (UNICEF & UNESCO, 2017). Inclusive education systems wherein each individual has an equal opportunity for educational progress are a top global priority. The only articulated definition of inclusive education in India is found in the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act (RPWDA), 2016. which is harmonized with the UNCRPD. India has adopted a rights-based approach to the inclusion of children with



disabilities by ratifying the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and the UN Convention on Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD). Education systems that are designed to be inclusive, equitable, and empowering can help build inclusive societies. This dynamic and organic connection between education and society lies at the heart of creating change and achieving social justice. The past twenty years in India have seen significant legal and political commitments towards universalization of education and the right to education (UNESCO, 2019).

**Overview of International Commitments:** To secure equal opportunity for educational progress for every individual is a global priority. The rights of children with disabilities to inclusion, non-discrimination, and equal opportunity for education, have been articulated in both local and international normative frameworks. Such a rights-based approach is targeted towards guaranteeing and promoting full enjoyment of life experiences for CWDs, enabling them to exercise their independence to the greatest extent possible, and creating inclusive educational and societal structures. The international context for the education of CWDs has been set largely by two types of instruments –international treaties, and declarations and political commitments (UNESCO, 2019).

**International treaties:** The 1989 UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and the 2006 UNCRPD treaty are two international human rights treaties that have a direct bearing on the right to education of CWDs. Although the UNCRC does not specifically mention children with disabilities, the various provisions when read together, supply grounds for governments to provide free and compulsory education to all children below 18 years and create education systems that are non-discriminatory, equitable, and accessible to all. The landmark UNCRPD treaty enunciates the human rights of persons with disabilities and includes substantive provisions related to education. It is also responsible for bringing inclusive education from a larger social justice perspective to the centre stage in international discourses. India has ratified both treaties. However, India has not signed the Optional

Protocol to the UN Convention on Rights of the Child, 2011, and the Optional Protocol to the UN Convention on Rights of Persons with Disabilities, 2006, both of which lay down communication procedures. Hence, monitoring of the implementation of treaty provisions happens only through the submission of periodic reports to the treaty bodies by the state.

**International treaties related to the right to education of CWDs (UNESCO, 2019):**

**UNCRC**

UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989 - ratified by India on 11 December 1992

- **Article 2:** Non-discrimination on grounds of disability.
- **Article 23:** Right to enjoy a full and decent life in conditions which ensure dignity, and promote self-reliance.
- **Article 28:** Right of the child to education.

**UNCRPD**

**UN Convention on Rights of Persons with Disabilities, 2006 - ratified by India on 1 October 2007**

- **Article 7:** Full enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental rights on an equal basis with other children, best interests of the child, and right to freedom of expression.
- **Article 24:** Inclusive education systems at all levels, access to inclusive, quality and free primary and secondary education, reasonable accommodation and support within the general education system.

**National Educational Framework in India:**

Education in India is managed by the Ministry of Human Resources and Development and does not have a separate political entity. In 1986, the National Policy on Education established compulsory education for all children between the ages of 6 and 14 (Sharma, U & Das, A, 2015). The Education for all movement Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) grew to be a national programme following the EFA conference in Dakar in 2000. Although evidence shows that progress was made towards access for vulnerable groups (scheduled casts, scheduled tribes, girls, children with disabilities, etc. (Singhal, N, 2005), the achievements in terms of quality of learning have been more difficult to



grasp, even for the very basic skills of literacy and numeracy (UNESCO, 2015). The 2005 Action Plan for Inclusive Education of Children and Youth with Disabilities brought into focus the specific actions required for making education a successful learning experience for this group. In 2009, the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act (RTE) was passed to ensure compulsory education between the ages of 6 and 14. India signed and ratified the UNCERPD in 2006 (Singhal, N, 2006). The 2011 census comprised a sole question to screen for disability within households, thus largely underestimating the prevalence of disabilities (2.7%), especially the most stigmatized forms of disabilities. A 2014 report carried out by the Social and Rural Research Institute provides more detailed data: 1.05% of children have a disability (2.1 million), and children with mental or multiple disabilities are disproportionately out of schools: 35.9% and 44.1%, respectively (Bakhshi, P et al., 2017). The report does not address factors that keep children out of learning systems.

**Current status of children with disabilities in India:** According to the 2011 census, there are 26,810,557 persons with disabilities in India, constituting 2.21 per cent of the country's population. This is much lower than the global figure of 15 percent of the world's population estimated to be living with disabilities (WHO, 2011). An analysis of the current situation indicates that an estimated 7.8 million children aged under nineteen live with disabilities. National estimates of the proportion of the population with disabilities are much lower than international estimates, leading to questions about the disability measures used in the Indian census (Bakhshi, P et al., 2017). The total number of children with disabilities (in the 0–19-year age group) is 7,864,636, making up 1.7 percent of the total child population. About one percent of children aged between 0 and 4 (numbering 1,291,637), about 1.5 percent of children aged between 5 and 9 (numbering 1,418,969), and over two percent of children between 10 and 19 (numbering 4,617,073) live with disabilities. Of the 5,572,336 children with disabilities in the 0-14-year age group, 72 percent reside in rural areas and 28 per cent in urban areas (UNESCO, 2019).

**Education of children with disabilities in India:**

The number of children enrolled in school drops significantly with each successive level of schooling. There are fewer girls with disabilities in school than boys. The proportion of children with disabilities who are out of school is much higher than the overall proportion of out-of-school children at the national level. Thus, although the schemes and programmes have brought children with disabilities into schools, gaps remain. The National Plan of Action for Children 2016 provides specific goals, strategies, and indicators for the education of CWDs, achievable by 2021 (UNESCO, 2019). According to the 2011 census, there are 368,697 five-year-olds with disabilities in India. Out of them, 99,259 (27 percent) attend educational institutions, while 263,966 (72 percent) have never attended any. More than one per cent have dropped out. A total of 40,801 children with disabilities below the age of 5 attend special schools. Out of them, 19,341 are girls (47 percent) and 21,460 are boys (53 percent) (Census of India, 2011). However, only 61 percent of CWDs aged between 5 and 19 attended an educational institution, 28 percent, compared to the overall figure of 71 percent when all children are considered. 12 percent of CWDs dropped out of school, which is comparable with the overall percentage of dropouts among all children. 27 percent of CWDs never attended any educational institution, as opposed to the overall figure of 17 percent when the entire child population is taken into account (Census of India, 2011). A large number of children with disabilities do not go to regular schools but are enrolled at the National Institute of Open Schooling (NIOS).

**Emotional Competence of Children with Disabilities:**

Children with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and learning disabilities (LD) have been found to experience difficulties with social and emotional competence (Singh, A, 2014). Underlying the ability to make friends and thrive in the social context, is the ability to modulate emotions. Emotional competence has been defined as the ability to adapt to a changing environment and to feel that one has managed an emotionally charged situation well (Saarni, C,



1999). Emotional competence is tied to social experience, and its development relies on parent-child and peer relationships. These relationships are forged over time and appear to be important in the later development of prosocial behaviours. Research evaluating the relationship between the attachment of the infant to his/her mother and the development of prosocial behaviours has found that children who are securely attached to their mother are less likely to show antisocial behaviours (Greenberg, M, et al., 1993). It is believed that secure attachment mediates the expression of aggression due to skills in social competence (Baron, R M & Kenny, D A, 1986; Clikeman, T A & Schafer, J, 2000). Most often, a rational corollary would be a link between mental health and the level of emotional competence. Carolyn Saarni, who popularised the concept of emotional competence (EC), described it as “the demonstration of self-efficacy in emotion-eliciting social transactions” (Saarni, C, 2011). Major components of EC are a skill for identifying personal feelings and those of others, b) skills for communicating emotion with others, and c) skills for coping with negative emotions. According to Saarni (2011), emotional competence has a developmental connotation to it, thereby suggesting a feature of modifiability as well as the intentionality of emotional abilities, thus, rendering itself a crucial ingredient for enhancement and modification. Considering low help-seeking behaviours for emotional and mental health issues among adolescents, universal preventive interventions, which are positive and proactive methods, seem appropriate to address the whole population regardless of risk status (Andrea et al., 2011). Further, as the school setting is familiar, non-threatening, naturalistic, and feasible, it allows systematic implementation of the program (Howard et al., 1999). The social and emotional needs of adolescents have become as important as their educational needs (Gayle, 2011). Despite the need, a gap has been found between research and implementation of the same in school-based preventive and promotive interventions, just as much as a gap between research and the need for clinical interventions for children and

adolescents (Joseph et al., 2011; Prasanna et al., 2017).

### **Conclusion**

The overcome the challenges and barriers of disabled children, the government should take the initiative and also maintain the proper strategies for the improvement of education status among disabled children. The following requirements of inclusive education will require additional funding, but even more importantly, they require the change of old and outdated attitudes, the appointment of trained teachers, and the adoption of proper policies and schemes. Studies support what many classroom teachers know by experience: that the benefits inclusion provides to all students easily justifies the effort. So far as the teaching-learning process is concerned, teachers face various challenges while teaching students with special needs and disabilities. Inclusive education does away with the practice of segregating students with learning and physical challenges from the rest of the students. Inclusive education helps disabled children develop a sense of pride in their work because they feel like they accomplished something. The Government of India needs to bridge the gaps in its education system to build a strong system of inclusive education in the country. So, there are the following measures for better implementation of Inclusive Education in India. A policy of inclusion needs to be implemented in all schools and throughout the Indian education system (NCF, 2005). Schools need to become centres that prepare children for life and ensure that all children, especially differently-abled children from marginalized sections and children in difficult circumstances, get the maximum benefit of this critical area of education.

### **Highlights of the present study**

- \* In order to improve the education status of disabled children, the government should take the initiative as well as maintain the proper strategies.
- \* The teachers must be properly trained.
- \* Policies and schemes must be properly implemented.
- \* The outdated attitudes must be changed.





- \* Inclusion provides numerous benefits to all students, making it well worth the effort.
- \* Inclusive education helps disabled children to develop a sense of pride in their work.
- \* In regular schools, inclusive education has become a primary policy objective.

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