



The Impact of Inclusive Education on Learners with and Without Disabilities: Role of Teachers in Diversified Classrooms

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Abstract

Inclusive education aims to integrate learners with and without disabilities in a shared learning environment, promoting equity and social cohesion. This paper examines the impact of inclusive education on both groups of learners, emphasizing the critical role teachers play in fostering a supportive and effective learning atmosphere. The study explores benefits such as improved social skills, reduced stigmatization, and enhanced academic performance while addressing challenges like resource constraints, teacher preparedness, and societal attitudes. By highlighting best practices and evidence-based strategies, this paper underscores the importance of teacher training and institutional support in realizing the full potential of inclusive education. The framework of NEP 2020 mandates that schools move entirely away from isolated special education toward a fully integrated model (Kumari, 2025). When implemented in regular classrooms, this model transforms the physical and pedagogical landscape from rigid instruction to flexible environments utilizing the Universal Design for Learning (UDL), which naturally accommodates varying cognitive and physical needs (Rani, 2024). The resulting impact on mainstream classrooms goes beyond simply integrating students with disabilities under one roof; it actively reshapes peer relationships by cultivating peer-to-peer empathy, minimizing long-standing socio-cultural stereotypes, and enhancing the overall educational quality index for both typically developing students and their special-needs peers (Ramsy, 2023). The pivotal role of teachers in navigating diversified classrooms is



discussed, highlighting the need for professional development, adaptive teaching strategies, and collaborative approaches. By reviewing relevant literature and practical case studies, this paper underscores the transformative potential of inclusive education when effectively implemented

Keywords: *Inclusive Education, Learners, disability, teacher, teaching, school*

Introduction

Education is a fundamental right and a cornerstone for achieving equality and social justice, equitable educational practices, aiming to ensure that all students, irrespective of their abilities or disabilities, have access to quality education in a shared learning environment. Inclusive education goes beyond mere access to schools; it involves creating an environment where learners of all abilities thrive together. This approach aligns with global frameworks such as the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDG 4) and the Salamanca Statement on Special Needs Education, emphasizing education for all. Despite its promise, inclusive education remains a complex undertaking, influenced by cultural, social, and institutional factors. Teachers, as key agents of change, play a pivotal role in shaping the success of inclusive classrooms. This paper explores the multifaceted impact of inclusive education on learners with and without disabilities, emphasizing the role of teachers in addressing the diverse needs of students. By examining theoretical frameworks, empirical evidence, and practical strategies, it aims to provide insights into creating effective inclusive educational environments.

This approach is rooted in principles of social justice, human rights, and educational equity, as emphasized by international frameworks such as the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD). While inclusive education offers significant benefits, its success hinges on several factors, including the preparedness and adaptability of teachers, institutional support, and societal attitudes.

1. The Concept of Inclusive Education

Inclusive education is founded on the principle that all learners, irrespective of their abilities or disabilities, have the right to quality education within a common learning environment. It is rooted in the ideals of equality, respect, and the celebration of diversity. Inclusive education seeks to dismantle barriers to learning and participation, ensuring that every learner feels valued and supported.



Defining Inclusive Education

At its core, inclusive education means providing equal opportunities for all students to participate in and benefit from education. It moves beyond the traditional segregated models, where children with disabilities or special needs were taught in separate settings, to a system where diversity is celebrated, and all students learn together in a shared environment. This approach recognizes that diversity among learners is not a problem but an opportunity to enrich the educational experience for everyone.

1.1 Legal and Policy Frameworks

Global and national policies advocate for inclusive education. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) and the Salamanca Statement provide a strong legal foundation. National policies, including legislation in various countries, reinforce commitments to inclusive practices. However, gaps often exist between policy and practice, necessitating focused efforts to bridge this divide.

Inclusive education is a transformative approach to teaching and learning that seeks to accommodate the diverse needs of all learners, regardless of their abilities, disabilities, socio-economic status, cultural background, or other factors. It promotes the idea that every child has the right to access quality education in an environment that fosters their full potential, respect, and dignity.

Principles of Inclusive Education

1. Equity and Accessibility

Inclusive education emphasizes equity, ensuring that every child has access to the resources, opportunities, and support they need to succeed. It focuses on eliminating barriers, whether physical, cultural, or attitudinal, that hinder participation.

2. Respect for Diversity

It acknowledges and values the unique contributions of every learner. Students from different cultural, linguistic, and socio-economic backgrounds, as well as those with varying abilities, are treated with respect and dignity.

3. Child-Centered Learning

Inclusive education promotes teaching strategies that cater to individual learning



styles, preferences, and abilities. It emphasizes a flexible curriculum and differentiated instruction that meet the needs of all learners.

4. **Collaboration and Community Engagement**

It relies on partnerships among teachers, parents, students, and communities to create an inclusive and supportive learning environment.

5. **Systemic Changes**

For inclusive education to thrive, systemic changes are required in policies, infrastructure, teacher training, and resource allocation.

Importance of Inclusive Education

Inclusive education is vital for creating a fair and just society. It breaks down stereotypes and promotes social cohesion by fostering mutual understanding and empathy among students from different backgrounds. This approach helps to combat discrimination and ensures that all children, regardless of their circumstances, have the opportunity to contribute meaningfully to society. Moreover, inclusive education enhances academic and social outcomes for all students. Research has shown that inclusive settings can improve communication skills, foster teamwork, and promote a deeper understanding of the world. For students with disabilities, inclusive education provides access to the same opportunities and experiences as their peers, improving their self-esteem and future prospects.

The Way Forward

Inclusive education is not just an educational imperative but a moral one. It aligns with international frameworks such as the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goal 4, which aims to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education for all. To realize the vision of inclusive education, stakeholders must commit to addressing systemic barriers, fostering collaboration, and embracing diversity as a strength.

In conclusion, inclusive education is a powerful tool for building a more equitable and harmonious society. By embracing diversity and ensuring that every child has the opportunity to learn and thrive, we can create a future where no one is left behind. The journey toward inclusion may be challenging, but its rewards—for individuals and society as a whole—are immeasurable.



2. Impact of Inclusive Education on Learners with Disabilities

Inclusive education significantly benefits learners with disabilities, enhancing their academic, social, and emotional development.

2.1 Academic Growth

Studies show that learners with disabilities perform better academically in inclusive settings compared to segregated environments. Access to diverse teaching strategies, peer interaction, and a stimulating environment fosters cognitive development. Inclusive settings provide access to the general curriculum, enhancing academic performance.

2.2 Social Skills and Peer Relationships

Inclusive settings encourage learners with disabilities to build friendships and develop interpersonal skills. Positive peer interactions help reduce feelings of isolation and stigma, promoting a sense of belonging. Interactions with peers promote communication, collaboration, and self-confidence.

2.3 Emotional and Psychological Well-being

A supportive and inclusive environment boosts the self-esteem and confidence of learners with disabilities. Exposure to diverse experiences fosters resilience and adaptability.

2.4 Sense of Belonging: Being part of a mainstream classroom fosters self-esteem and reduces feelings of isolation.

3. Impact of Inclusive Education on Learners Without Disabilities

Learners without disabilities also benefit from inclusive education through exposure to diversity and the development of empathy and leadership skills.

3.1 Development of Empathy and Social Awareness

Inclusive classrooms nurture empathy and understanding among learners without disabilities. Interactions with peers of diverse abilities foster tolerance and acceptance, shaping more socially responsible individuals.

3.2 Academic Outcomes

Collaborative learning in inclusive settings often leads to improved academic performance for all students. Peer-assisted learning strategies enable mutual growth and understanding.



3.3 Leadership and Problem-Solving Skills

Learners without disabilities often assume roles of mentors or collaborators, enhancing their leadership and problem-solving abilities.

3.4 Empathy and Understanding: Exposure to diverse peers cultivates compassion and reduces stereotypes.

3.5 Collaborative Skills: Working in heterogeneous groups enhances teamwork and problem-solving abilities.

3.6 Cultural Competence: Inclusive environments prepare students for diverse real-world scenarios.

4. Role of Teachers in Inclusive Education

In the 21st century, inclusive education has evolved beyond merely integrating students with disabilities into general education settings; it now encompasses a broader mandate to cater to all learners who may be historically marginalized due to cultural, linguistic, or socioeconomic factors (Forlin, 2013). Within these highly diversified classrooms, the role of the teacher has fundamentally transformed from a traditional transmitter of knowledge to a dynamic facilitator of equitable learning environments (Chow et al., 2023). The multifaceted role of teachers in 21st-century inclusive education can be categorized into several key dimensions:

1. Facilitator of Differentiated Instruction and Inclusive Pedagogy

Modern educators must move away from a "one-size-fits-all" teaching model. The focus has shifted toward proactive, flexible instruction designed to reduce learning barriers for all students from the outset:

- **Universal Design for Learning (UDL):** Teachers utilize UDL frameworks to offer multiple options for representation, expression, and engagement, allowing diverse learners to navigate content according to their needs (Ewe et al., 2023).
- **Curriculum Adaptation:** Inclusive teachers actively modify instructional methodologies, materials, and assessments to support a wider spectrum of student processing speeds, language competencies, and cognitive abilities (Chow et al., 2023).



2. Cultivator of Social Justice and Belonging

Inclusive education is deeply tied to democratic ideals and social justice. Teachers act as the architects of classroom culture, ensuring every student feels valued:

- **Challenging Deficit Perspectives:** Rather than viewing a student's disability or cultural background through a deficit lens, effective teachers adopt an asset-based approach, redefining "normality" to prevent subtle forms of marginalization (Valdés, 2026).
- **Fostering Empathy and Peers Interaction:** By creating structured interactive learning environments—such as cooperative learning groups and peer tutoring—teachers cultivate a space where typically developing students learn to accept differences and reduce prejudices, benefiting the cognitive and social development of both groups (Molina Roldán et al., 2021).

3. Collaborative Practitioner

Given the complexity of 21st-century diversified classrooms, teachers can no longer work in isolation. Collaboration is core to successful inclusion:

- **Inter-professional Collaboration:** General education teachers must work closely with special educators, speech therapists, counselors, and support staff to execute tailored learning paths and co-teaching strategies (Chow et al., 2023).
- **Community and Parental Alliances:** Building strong partnerships with families and caretakers allows teachers to align home-school interventions and respect the diverse cultural experiences students bring into the classroom.

4. Driver of Digital Transformation

The rapid shift toward digital instruction offers unprecedented opportunities for classroom diversification:



- **Digital Text Competency:** 21st-century teachers integrate digital tools to provide multimodal representation (visual, auditory, interactive), which helps scaffold text and content activities according to varying student strengths (Blomberg Kjellström, 2026).

Teachers are central to the success of inclusive education. Their attitudes, skills, and strategies determine how well they address the needs of diverse learners.

Professional Development: Teachers must receive training in inclusive pedagogies, differentiated instruction, and behavior management. Continuous professional development ensures they remain equipped to handle evolving classroom dynamics.

4.1 Teacher Attitudes and Beliefs

A teacher's belief in the value of inclusion is fundamental. Positive attitudes towards learners with disabilities create a welcoming and supportive environment. Training and exposure to inclusive practices help in shaping these beliefs.

4.2 Professional Development and Training

Teachers require specialized training to address the needs of diverse learners. Professional development programs should focus on:

- Differentiated instruction
- Classroom management in diverse settings
- Use of assistive technologies
- Collaborative teaching strategies

4.3 Strategies for Effective Inclusive Classrooms

- **Differentiated Instruction:** Tailoring teaching methods to meet diverse learning needs.
- **Universal Design for Learning (UDL):** Creating flexible learning environments accessible to all.
- **Collaborative Practices:** Engaging co-teachers, specialists, and families in the learning process.
- **Positive Behavior Support:** Promoting a respectful and cooperative classroom culture.

4.4 Challenges Faced by Teachers

- Lack of resources and support
- Large class sizes
- Limited access to professional development



- Societal attitudes and biases

Addressing these challenges requires systemic reforms and sustained support for educators.

Inclusive classrooms aim to accommodate students with diverse abilities, backgrounds, and learning needs. However, teachers often face several challenges in these settings. Here are some key challenges:

1. Lack of Training and Resources

- **Insufficient Professional Development:** Many teachers lack specialized training to address the needs of students with disabilities or diverse backgrounds.
- **Inadequate Resources:** Limited access to teaching aids, technology, or materials tailored for inclusive education.

2. Classroom Management

- **Behavioral Issues:** Managing disruptive behaviors from students with special needs while ensuring the learning environment is conducive for all.
- **Time Management:** Balancing the needs of students with varying learning speeds and abilities.

3. Diverse Learning Needs

- **Individualized Attention:** Designing and implementing Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) for students with specific needs can be time-intensive.
- **Curriculum Adaptation:** Modifying the curriculum to suit different learners without compromising on educational standards.

4. Lack of Support

- **Insufficient Collaboration:** Limited collaboration with special education professionals, counselors, or teaching assistants.
- **Parental Involvement:** Engaging parents in the educational process can be challenging, especially when they are unaware of their child's specific needs or rights.

5. Social Integration

- **Peer Acceptance:** Fostering an inclusive environment where students accept and respect their peers with different needs.
- **Bullying:** Addressing issues of bullying or exclusion faced by students with disabilities or learning differences.



6. Attitudinal Barriers

- **Resistance to Change:** Some teachers may hold preconceived notions or lack confidence in their ability to manage inclusive classrooms effectively.
- **Cultural Biases:** Addressing cultural stereotypes or biases among students and staff.

7. Policy and Infrastructure

- **Inadequate Policies:** Absence of clear guidelines or frameworks for implementing inclusive education.
- **Physical Barriers:** Lack of infrastructure like ramps, elevators, or accessible classrooms to accommodate students with physical disabilities.

8. Emotional Burnout

- **Stress and Fatigue:** The additional workload and emotional demands of addressing diverse needs can lead to teacher burnout.
- **Lack of Recognition:** Teachers may feel unappreciated for their efforts in creating an inclusive environment.

4.5 Adaptive Teaching Strategies:

- **Universal Design for Learning (UDL):** Ensures lesson plans cater to varied learning styles and abilities.
- **Individualized Education Plans (IEPs):** Tailored strategies for students with specific needs.
- **Peer Tutoring and Cooperative Learning:** Encourages mutual support among students.

Collaboration and Support:

- **With Specialists:** Partnering with special educators, therapists, and counselors enhances classroom inclusivity.
- **Parental Involvement:** Engaging families fosters a holistic support system for learners.

Creating Inclusive Cultures: Teachers play a vital role in fostering respect, understanding, and a positive classroom culture that values diversity.



5. Challenges and Barriers to Inclusive Education

While inclusive education offers numerous benefits, it is not without challenges. Common barriers include:

- **Resource Constraints:** Insufficient funding and lack of infrastructure.
- **Inadequate Teacher Preparation:** Limited training opportunities and professional development.
- **Social and Cultural Attitudes:** Resistance to inclusion due to stigma and misconceptions.
- **Policy-Practice Gap:** Discrepancies between inclusive education policies and their implementation.

Inclusive education aims to ensure equal access to quality education for all students, regardless of their abilities, disabilities, or backgrounds. However, several challenges and barriers hinder its effective implementation. These can be broadly categorized into structural, social, cultural, and policy-related barriers.

1. Attitudinal Barriers

- **Stigma and Stereotyping:** Preconceived notions about students with disabilities or those from marginalized backgrounds often lead to exclusion or discrimination.
- **Lack of Awareness:** Teachers, parents, and communities may lack understanding of the benefits and principles of inclusive education.

2. Policy and Legislative Barriers

- **Insufficient Policies:** Inadequate or poorly implemented policies to promote inclusion.
- **Limited Funding:** Budget constraints often lead to a lack of resources, such as assistive technologies and specialized support.
- **Bureaucratic Challenges:** Delayed implementation of existing policies due to administrative inefficiencies.

3. Educational System Barriers

- **Rigid Curriculum:** Traditional curricula often do not accommodate diverse learning needs.
- **Teacher Training:** Many educators are not adequately trained to handle diverse classrooms or use inclusive teaching strategies.



- **Assessment Methods:** Standardized testing methods may not account for different abilities and learning styles.

4. Infrastructure and Resource Barriers

- **Accessibility Issues:** Schools may lack ramps, elevators, or accessible restrooms, making them physically inaccessible to students with disabilities.
- **Limited Resources:** A shortage of learning aids, assistive technologies, and trained staff hampers inclusivity.
- **Overcrowded Classrooms:** High student-teacher ratios limit individualized attention.

5. Cultural and Social Barriers

- **Cultural Norms:** Societal beliefs and norms may discourage the inclusion of certain groups, such as girls, ethnic minorities, or students with disabilities.
- **Parental Resistance:** Families may be hesitant to send children to inclusive schools due to fear of stigmatization or concerns about the quality of education.

6. Economic Barriers

- **Cost of Education:** Additional costs for transportation, assistive devices, or private support services may prevent families from enrolling their children.
- **Poverty:** Families in low-income groups may prioritize work over education, particularly for children with disabilities or from marginalized communities.

7. Language and Communication Barriers

- **Language Diversity:** Students from linguistic minorities may struggle with a lack of instruction in their native languages.
- **Communication Challenges:** Students with hearing or speech impairments may lack access to sign language interpreters or appropriate resources.

8. Psychological Barriers

- **Low Self-Esteem:** Students with disabilities or from marginalized groups may experience low confidence due to previous experiences of exclusion.
- **Fear of Failure:** Negative attitudes from peers or educators may discourage active participation.

Research on inclusive learning environments demonstrates that integrating students with and without special educational needs or disabilities yields neutral to positive



outcomes for all participants. For students with disabilities, being educated in general education settings consistently correlates with comparable or superior academic achievement, stronger communication skills, and an enhanced sense of social belonging. Meanwhile, empirical evidence indicates that the academic progress of typically developing students without special educational needs is not compromised by the presence of peers with disabilities, showing similar trajectories in language and mathematics skills development over time (Szumski et al., 2022). Furthermore, inclusion fosters vital social advantages for students without disabilities, allowing them to cultivate greater tolerance, empathy, and appreciation for diversity within an integrated classroom environment.

Strategies to Overcome Barriers

1. **Capacity Building:** Training teachers and staff to understand and implement inclusive practices.
2. **Policy Enhancement:** Strengthening policies to promote inclusion and allocating sufficient funding.
3. **Community Engagement:** Raising awareness to combat stigma and foster acceptance.
4. **Curriculum Adaptation:** Developing flexible and diverse teaching methods and materials.
5. **Infrastructure Development:** Ensuring schools are accessible and equipped with the necessary resources.
6. **Support Systems:** Establishing counseling services and peer support groups.

Addressing these challenges requires a collaborative effort from governments, educators, communities, and organizations to ensure every child has the opportunity to learn and thrive.

6. Best Practices for Inclusive Education

To overcome these challenges, schools and policymakers must adopt evidence-based practices:

- **Policy Advocacy:** Strengthening legal and policy frameworks for inclusion.
- **Community Engagement:** Involving parents, communities, and stakeholders in the process.
- **Capacity Building:** Investing in teacher training and resources.



- **Monitoring and Evaluation:** Regular assessment of inclusive practices to identify areas for improvement.
- **Professional Development:** Regular training programs on inclusive practices.
- **Enhanced Support:** Employing special educators, counsellors, and teaching assistants.
- **Resource Allocation:** Providing adequate funding for assistive technology and teaching materials.
- **Awareness Programs:** Promoting inclusivity among students, parents, and staff.
- **Policy Framework:** Implementing comprehensive policies that support inclusive education at all levels.

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 explicitly recognizes that "education is the single greatest tool for achieving social justice and equality," advocating for a completely restructured system that merges traditional lines of exclusion into a broader focus on Socio-Economically Disadvantaged Groups (SEDGs), including learners with physical and learning disabilities (Ministry of Human Resource Development [MHRD], 2020). By prioritizing equitable access, individualized educational plans, assistive technologies, and comprehensive teacher capacity building, the framework mandates that schools move entirely away from isolated special education toward a fully integrated model (Kumari, 2025). When implemented in regular classrooms, this model transforms the physical and pedagogical landscape from rigid instruction to flexible environments utilizing the Universal Design for Learning (UDL), which naturally accommodates varying cognitive and physical needs (Rani, 2024). The resulting impact on mainstream classrooms goes beyond simply integrating students with disabilities under one roof; it actively reshapes peer relationships by cultivating peer-to-peer empathy, minimizing long-standing socio-cultural stereotypes, and enhancing the overall educational quality index for both typically developing students and their special-needs peers (Ramsy, 2023).

Conclusion Inclusive education is a transformative approach that benefits all learners by fostering equity, respect, and collaboration. It enhances academic, social, and emotional outcomes for learners with and without disabilities, preparing them for a more inclusive society.



Teachers play a critical role in this process, and their preparedness and attitudes significantly influence the success of inclusive practices.

While challenges persist, a collective commitment to addressing these barriers can make inclusive education a reality. By investing in teacher training, resources, and community engagement, we can create learning environments where every child feels valued and empowered to reach their full potential.

Inclusive education holds the promise of transforming learning environments into spaces that nurture diversity, equity, and mutual respect. While challenges persist, the benefits for learners with and without disabilities are profound. Teachers are pivotal in actualizing this vision, requiring ongoing support, training, and resources to meet diverse student needs effectively. Commitment from educational institutions, policymakers, and communities is crucial to realizing the full potential of inclusive education.

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