

Effectiveness of Government Schemes for Inclusive Education at the Secondary Level

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Abstract

Research on Inclusive Education offers pertinent background material, encompassing basic definitions, conceptual underpinnings, relevant legislation, and a detailed survey of national schemes and programs to promote educational opportunities for all children (ROSMIATI et al., 2019).

The educational landscape mirrors society; therefore, educational reforms should also aim at building an equal society that appreciates, respects, and celebrates diversity. Characterized by the interaction of personal, social, and environmental factors, inclusivity extends from disability to gender, ethnic, and linguistic equity. The goal is to provide all children the opportunity to learn, grow, develop character, and realize their full potential. Institutions like schools, colleges, and universities should co-operate with family, communities, non-governmental organizations, and local administration to foster emotional and social intelligence. Education should continue after childhood, with individuals pursuing growth and development through self-learning and acquiring new skills, values, and knowledge.

Keywords: Inclusive Education, Government Schemes schools, colleges, and universities

1. Introduction

Although the debate on the definition of inclusive education continues, a comprehensive conceptual framework emerges, incorporating personal and collective agency, legitimating schools and authorities to address obstacles, and extending the concept to affective, cognitive, and social aspects of learning (Paramane, 2016). The framework encompasses two pivotal dimensions relevant to policy in secondary education, namely inclusion and equity.

Inclusion denotes respecting every individual's right to be an integral part of society and enjoying the same opportunities as others. Inclusionary pedagogy therefore signifies the creation of learning opportunities from which all students can benefit, irrespective of diverse differences, be they disability, gender, language, or socioeconomic. Such pedagogy is often initiated through adjustments to the significant body of knowledge and understanding embodied in curriculum standards; Universal Design for Learning and accompanying frameworks concerning access, engagement, and expression inform these adaptations, while provisions for aids, accommodations, and assistive technology interact with standards to further extend equitable access (ROSMIATI et al., 2019).

Equity is considered in relation to three facets, namely diversity, difference, and disadvantage. Diversity reflects the variety of human characteristics, encompassing disability, gender, language, or creed. Difference denotes the features that characterize each individual; inclusion, however, requires that such differences do not deprive someone of access to opportunities on an equal footing with others. Disadvantage relates specifically to the unavailability of support structures or to a community's rejection of an individual's validity.

2. Conceptual Framework of Inclusive Education

Inclusive education requires a clear conceptual framework in secondary schools to address national programs, involving policy objectives, target populations, expected outcomes, and implementation mechanisms. Inclusion extends beyond just schooling for those with disabilities, encompassing educational access for various categories based on language, gender, or socio-professional class. It values societal diversity and recognizes commonalities while keeping the individual at the heart of education. For schools to achieve inclusion, all stakeholders must be engaged for awareness, preparation, and support. The complex processes of education must support the primary goal of inclusion, rather than detract from it. Teaching acknowledges diverse behaviors and competencies, recognizing that each youth embodies multiple, often hidden diversities that go beyond traditional categorizations. Classroom behaviors can reveal additional, sometimes overlooked diversities. Political views and entrance screenings can impose constraints on inclusivity. However, an uncompromising pursuit of inclusive competence upholds the essence of education, contrasting merely adding "education without exclusion" to existing practices. Before class begins, economic equity should be evaluated while opportunities for individuals must be consistently addressed, and not just offered. Addressing behavior peculiar to significant youth must be met with genuine autonomy, rather than superficial solutions, as real opportunities are seldom shared. The intricate web of equality and

inclusion calls for careful consideration in fostering an educational environment that truly embraces every individual. (ANDREW A., 2016)(ROSMIATI et al., 2019)

3. Policy Landscape and Legislative Context

Inclusive education policy builds on the national commitment to universal access to education by recognizing the need to effectively enroll, retain, and support specific populations at the secondary level. Laws mandate inclusion of students with disabilities, girls, displaced children, and those from marginalized groups—such as lower-caste communities, linguistic minorities, and religious minorities in specific region—who are entitled to an Individualized Education Plan (IEP). Monitoring indicators focus on access and participation in secondary education; measures to examine complementary aspects such as retention, transition, and learning outcomes exist but are less prominent (ANDREW A., 2016).

For students with disabilities, inclusion remains a fundamental right, one that is advanced significantly through systems designed to operationalize universal access. Thus, attention is devoted to policies and programmes that strengthen participation, without suggesting that inclusion in secondary education stands apart from broader objectives of access and equity.

4. National Schemes and Programs Targeting Secondary Education

Inclusive education in India focuses heavily on secondary schooling, with government spending primarily on primary education and higher education. The first year of secondary schooling is critical for children's educational progress. Initiatives like the Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan (RMSA) aim to improve access, equity, quality, and infrastructure in secondary education. These programs, alongside state funding, enhance inclusivity in secondary schools. A detailed overview of these schemes is provided. The Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan emphasizes inclusion at the secondary level, addressing the high dropout rates of 58% observed during this stage. National policies reinforce the commitment to inclusive education through these government initiatives. (Paramane, 2016)

4.1. Access and Admissions Initiatives

Accessible education is a fundamental right for all individuals. The National Policy on Education (NPE) and the Programme of Action (POA) mandate that educational institutions admit one child with a disability for every fifteen children without disabilities. However, challenges to their admission and participation persist. The Remedial Teaching Programme for Disabled Children under the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) offers flexibility in policy formulation. Supportive provisions in government policies and various national

programs facilitate the effective inclusion of individuals with disabilities in education. Since the last educational policy document in 1986, empowerment of persons with disabilities remained unaddressed; however, India signed the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) in 2006, committing to its implementation. (Paramane, 2016)

4.2. Resource Allocation and Infrastructure Upgrades

Global regional and income disparities remain wide gaps in secondary school attendance. Countries must implement policy measures to ensure equitable access to secondary education in a complex educational environment by coordinating among activities in various areas (M Lewin, 2007).

Resource allocation focuses on institutional and infrastructural work to provide adequate accommodations to facilitate effective teaching and learning among students with diverse needs. Use of facilities, teaching documentation, physical arrangements, building designs and the extent of compliance of students with rules are assessed.

4.3. Support Services: Counseling, Speech-Language, and Occupational Therapy

Severe shortages of education support specialists impede inclusive education policies in South Africa's high schools. There's an acute lack of occupational and speech-language therapists, with district support teams often existing only on paper. When appointed, support is typically offered in private settings, not public schools. Consequently, educators must take on the roles of remedial teachers and therapists without adequate training, which hinders equitable participation and academic progress. Learners with disabilities face significant disparities in accessing basic education, especially those from poor households, with an estimated 70 percent either not attending school or placed in separate institutions. The practice of inclusive education remains limited and poorly coordinated. The national commitment to inclusive policies is further weakened by widespread negative attitudes toward disability. Many communities perceive disability as a curse or a shameful burden, shaping school-level decisions significantly. As a result, schools tend to accept only a narrow range of disabled children, often excluding those with more complex needs due to a lack of trained staff, viewing broader enrolments as too risky. (Steinhoff, 2015)

4.4. Teacher Training and Professional Development

National schemes and programs for secondary education include provisions for teacher training and professional development, targeting a variety of populations underserved by mainstream education such as children with disabilities. Program descriptions typically encompass goals, target beneficiaries, funding sources, and anticipated results. Funding

may be channeled through central ministries or states/regions, as for the Centrally Sponsored Scheme on Teacher Education (CSSTE). Coordination is generally joint among central ministries, state/region governments, and local jurisdictions. Eligibility criteria and enrollment or application procedures also vary widely.

Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) represent one mechanism for tracking and documenting student needs, adjustments, and progress toward outcomes. Schools develop IEPs in response to a formal identification and assessment process; the plans are then routinely monitored and reviewed. The preparation and evaluation of IEPs normally involve teachers or relevant specialists familiar with the student, guiding the assistance provided and ensuring that limited resources are allocated efficiently. Effective progress-tracking systems often incorporate IEPs, facilitating coordination of support by documenting and disseminating student difficulties and corresponding strategies (Saleem, 2016).

4.5. Inclusive Curriculum and Assessment Reforms

Inclusive curricula and assessment policies survey adjustments to subject matter, teaching approaches, and evaluation methods designed to accommodate diverse learner needs while meeting central guidelines. Several national schemes and programs encourage curriculum and assessment reforms, yet their implementation across states and regions remains partial (Paramane, 2016).

Curriculum modifications include the reduction or replacement of topics deemed non-essential by centralized subject standards. Alternative assessments and exemptions from standardized tests are options for students unable to participate in mainstream examinations (ROSMIATI et al., 2019). Tracking and reviewing Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) for these learners adds further complexity to the assessment system yet underscores the applicability of an inclusive education framework that considers disability, gender, linguistic background, and socioeconomic status.

Supporting policies clarify the concept of inclusion as well as inclusionary pedagogy. At the theoretical level, Universal Design for Learning occupies a prominent position within the discourse, where it intersects with technological developments. The absence of a sufficiently articulated conceptual foundation limits the extent of cross-learning and diminishes curriculum-design opportunities across settings.

4.6. Parental and Community Engagement

National schemes encourage parent and community engagement to support student access, retention, and achievement. Engagement initiatives aim to align school priorities with local needs, inform feedback systems, and promote capacity building. Community

involvement leverages local resources, knowledge, and networks. Strengthening partnerships with parents and communities builds trust and fosters collaboration in decision-making to ensure schooling remains relevant and financed. Consultations with parents and communities help schools incorporate local cultures and languages, creating a more relevant and comfortable setting for students. Parental engagement in the early years minimizes dropout risk and enhances participation in higher education (Paramane, 2016).

Community and parental participation mechanisms usually have multiple channels. Monthly open meetings solicit feedback on institutional standards and functioning, enabling schools to adjust practices accordingly. School staff visits enhance trust and inform families about student academic performance, general discipline, physical health, and punctuality. Capacity-building opportunities like literacy programs raise educational awareness, allowing families to make constructive suggestions and collaborate with schools. Regular publishing of student performance data fosters transparency and encourages broader engagement, promoting an inclusive environment (Amendt, 2008).

5. Implementation Mechanisms at the School Level

Inclusive education is a systematic approach to ensure that all children, regardless of their socio-economic conditions, gender, language, religious beliefs, disabilities, or learning differences, have the same opportunities, quality education, and access to schools (Paramane, 2016). Teacher training and an inclusive curriculum are two essential components associated with implementing inclusive education programs. Both have been acknowledged as enabling conditions in teacher education and school environments for quality education. Universal Design for Learning (UDL) has been adopted in many countries, including India, as a well-structured and well-recognized framework to approach inclusive education. UDL underscores the need to lessen barriers in curriculum and instructional strategies for all learners at the outset, rather than seeking solutions following the establishment of curricula and classroom activities for a learner with disabilities. Individualized Education Plans (IEPs)—a nationally adopted practice designed to cater to the diverse needs of different students—attempt to provide learners with the appropriate level of support they need to acquire the curriculum. Nevertheless, despite national policies promoting UDL and IEPs, these practices are applicable to only a minority of classrooms and continue to be used in widely different ways.

5.1. Identification and Early Screening

The Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan and the Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan emphasize early screening and identification as a foundation for inclusive education. Government

guidelines recommend a two-stage process. The first stage comprises initial screening at pre-primary or Class I, considering parents' or guardians' observations of 13 potential difficulties that encompass cognitive, linguistic, social, emotional, physical, sensory, behavioral, and other areas (Paramane, 2016). Follow-up screening occurs at school, guided by two checklists evaluating the child's adaptive behavior and development and learning-related socio-emotional and skill aspects. Schools record this information in an inclusion card that accompanies the student throughout their schooling. Prior to the first screening, the school and its community must disseminate key information about inclusive schooling and the screening process—timelines, locations, expectations, and confidentiality assurances—to ensure awareness and ease of participation (Motitswe, 2014).

Student information is collected digitally within the broader education management information system to facilitate longitudinal tracking and analysis of promotion and dropout rates. Compliance with the Right to Education Act and relevant policies and guidelines is monitored through data on five enrollment-related indicators: spending, school availability, dropouts, transition to higher education, and student feedback (ROSMIATI et al., 2019).

5.2. Individualized Education Plans and IEP Tracking

School-level implementation of national programs for inclusive education requires early identification of students with special needs through screening. The early determination of a student's learning requirements influences the actions taken to accommodate those needs. In the field of Special Needs Education (SNE), Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) are often developed to outline the specific needs of students requiring various forms of support. An IEP provides a clear record of the interventions and accommodations that need to be implemented to facilitate inclusion, promote learning, and enable the child to reach his/her full potential (Motitswe, 2014). Although the existence and upkeep of an IEP are crucial for effective inclusion within the education system, there are unclear implementation practices and a lack of follow-up concerning the plans themselves. In many instances, while the need for an IEP is identified, a comprehensive action plan is never created, or the created plan is not effectively tracked and maintained (King et al., 2017).

5.3. Universal Design for Learning in Practice

Although some aspects of implementation remain incomplete, the introduction of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) provides a practical, integrative framework for designing and delivering inclusive education. UDL encompasses essential principles for

helping learners with diverse needs access and engage with the national curriculum. This approach aids schools in selecting and adapting pedagogical strategies and in determining the most suitable accommodations and assistive technologies. UDL materials and resources can be accessed through the the South African National Department of Basic Education's website.

UDL aims to deliver equitable learning opportunities for all by minimizing physical, cognitive, social, and communicative barriers and maximizing individual choice and independence. UDL does not dilute or lower curriculum standards but creates more open and flexible learning environments for all learners. Instructional practices should align with UDL principles that address multiple means of:

- representation—how information is presented. For example, physical science topics might be represented through speech, text, graphics, animation, webcasts, maps, or capsules.
- action and expression—how learners demonstrate their knowledge. For example, learners might show their understanding through speech, writing, drawing, models, drama, video, or web-based products.
- engagement—how the environment stimulates interest and motivation. For example, teachers might engage learners through interest, prior knowledge, relevance, structure, choice of process or product, and peer collaboration. (M. Dalton et al., 2012)

5.4. Assistive Technologies and Accessibility Measures

Assistive technology includes devices, materials, and services that improve independence and quality of life for people with disabilities. It is essential for experiential learning, as students face challenges accessing materials, necessitating adaptations. This is particularly critical for those with sensory and note-taking impairments, who require effective devices to capture class information. Text-to-speech programs enhance engagement for students unable to read. Continuous updates to electronic materials ensure access to learning. Government schemes widely provide assistive technology to support learning. High school students also need assistive devices post-primary education, prompting schools to assess each student's needs at lower secondary intake. Implementing a “Universal Design” principle can improve the accessibility of assistive materials. Furthermore, establishing a dedicated budget for acquiring assistive tools positively affects accessibility, ensuring students maintain access to educational materials beyond school hours through longer update cycles.

5.5. Monitoring, Accountability, and Evaluation Systems

Successful implementation of national secondary education programs necessitates robust monitoring, accountability, and evaluation systems to track effectiveness. Regular monitoring and reporting are essential for understanding school practices, identifying capacity gaps, and addressing emerging issues. Accountability ensures that educational authorities at all levels are responsible for providing inclusive education as outlined in relevant laws and policies. By creating common indicators aligned with national education policies, governments can evaluate inclusiveness in school education. Additionally, collecting data by disability type, gender, socioeconomic status, and location helps identify specific barriers to access and participation in education. (ROSMIATI et al., 2019)(Paramane, 2016)

6. Challenges, Gaps, and Equity Considerations

Despite recognizing inclusive education as a right, governments often fail to implement effective programs. The unique challenges in secondary education—a transitional phase for learners—impact policy and government initiatives. This stage aims to shape individuals into responsible citizens who can make independent choices across various aspects of life. Addressing specific challenges and equity considerations in public secondary education is essential. Various obstacles hinder the commitment to equitable education for all, regardless of background or ability. Many government initiatives focus mainly on access and attendance while overlooking the improvement of teaching quality, support services, and learning outcomes. Insufficient efforts to eliminate disparities raise concerns about equity related to gender, social background, and institutions. While primary education programs target economically disadvantaged or marginalized groups, secondary education lacks specific focus on these populations. The absence of comprehensive data hampers the understanding of educational frameworks, complicating gap assessment and potential for learning. Limited data availability also constrains insights into the status of minority or disadvantaged groups and the implications of intersecting identities on disadvantage or discrimination. (Dorcas Oluremi, 2015)

7. Case Studies of Effective Practices in Secondary Schools

Secondary schools in diverse contexts implement distinctive yet successful practices to promote inclusion. The cases described in this section highlight scalable solutions across three domains: admission to school or specific courses; effective tracking systems for Individualized Education Plans; and the incorporation of Universal Design for Learning principles in science, technology, engineering, arts, and mathematics subjects.

Cohorts are admitted to core subjects when entry qualifications are not required. During enrollment, students provide information to identify whether they have a disability, have an Individualized Education Plan in place, or require additional support. Based on this information, schools proactively reach out to students to offer assistance. Online forms facilitate the required steps for applying to open classes with accommodations, thereby making the admissions process easier for both students and teachers.

An accessible registry for Individualized Education Plans allows teachers to monitor each student's situation, origin of the disability, needs, and resources in use. Periodic reviews enable every student to reflect on their development and set new goals. Classroom observations help cluster students with similar requirements together, ensuring that teachers can focus on targeted and equitable practices.

To engage adolescents effectively, classroom design places learning materials at the centre of activity, in line with teen culture. Teaching-learning materials are developed with Universal Design for Learning principles in mind, proactively addressing barriers to engagement, representation, and action/expression. In science, technology, engineering, arts, and mathematics subjects, materials include supplementary explanations of symbols, glossaries, and multimedia resources that suggest additional pathways. Since adolescents often prefer the familiar formats of social-networking sites, strategies are adapted from those environments (Maciver et al., 2017).

8. Policy Recommendations for Strengthening Inclusion in Secondary Education

Formulate policy recommendations to strengthen inclusion in secondary education, based on analysis of national schemes and programs, implementation mechanisms, practices in effective case-study schools, and the challenges and equity considerations they reveal.

Specify measures to align funding, monitoring, and accountability systems with inclusive policy and practice by linking budget allocations, progress indicators, and reporting obligations to access, retention, completion, and transition outcomes for all students regardless of disability, gender, language, or socioeconomic status.

Enhance teacher preparation and ongoing professional development in Universal Design for Learning, inclusionary pedagogy, appropriate accommodations, and assistive technologies, and establish performance indicators to evaluate the acquisition and application of these competencies.

Strengthen parental and community engagement and transparency by formalizing channels for soliciting input in policy dialogue, developing regular feedback loops to

communicate findings, and offering capacity-building activities to empower stakeholders in their advocacy and involvement.

Standardize data collection, reporting, and impact evaluation procedures according to widely accepted indicators and protocols to capture and communicate the influence of policies, schemes, and practices on access, retention, completion, and transition across the diversity of eligible populations, and enable comparisons across jurisdictions (ROSMIATI et al., 2019).

9. Conclusion

Strengthening the approach to inclusive education in secondary schools remains indispensable for meeting national and international commitments on the right to inclusive schooling and enhancing equity in access to quality, relevant education. The vast majority of government schemes, programs, and initiatives targeting secondary education continue to apply established definitions of inclusion, including pedagogy, and prioritise integrated approaches to disability and gender. Greater precision in conceptualising the scope and nature of inclusive education, and explicitly calling for systemic reforms to address the diverse needs of marginalised groups beyond disability in national schemes and programmatic initiatives, would sharpen policy focus. Additional emphasis on mechanisms at the school level—where the aforementioned schemes, programmes, and initiatives are implemented—would provide a more comprehensive perspective on existing efforts to strengthen inclusive approaches in secondary education (ROSMIATI et al., 2019) ; (Dorcas Oluremi, 2015).

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