# International Journal of Research Publication and Reviews

# Social Inclusion and Empowerment through Inclusive Education and Supportive Technology for Individuals in India

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### ABSTRACT

Inclusive education is a human right that fosters social inclusion and empowerment, especially in India, where over 70 million people have disabilities. Accessibility issues persist in spite of progressive laws like the National Education Policy (2020) and the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act (2016). This article examines societal issues, assistive technologies, and inclusive education. The significance of technology is demonstrated through case studies like the Annie Braille gadget. Although policies offer a starting point, financing, teacher preparation, and awareness-raising are necessary for effective implementation.

## Introduction

All students have more opportunity for academic and social success when they follow the educational concept and methodology known as inclusion. This covers chances to engage in all kinds of extracurricular, religious, artistic, athletic, musical, social, recreational, and day care and after-school activities. (Singh, 2021). The idea behind inclusive education (IE) is that all students, regardless of ability or handicap, should attend regular courses in local district schools and receive the instruction and support they need. According to the United Nations' Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, inclusive education is a human right, which makes it a significant concept. (Grönlund et al., 2010).

In India, where over 70 million people have disabilities, inclusive education is particularly crucial since it promotes diversity and collaborative learning opportunities. Major policy improvements such as the Rights of Person with Disabilities Act (2016) and the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 have not eliminated the numerous barriers to educational access. The Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment (2023) reports that over 65% of Indian children with disabilities do not regularly attend school due to a lack of money, societal discrimination, and accessibility concerns. This statistic highlights the systemic inequities that hinder educational involvement and access. As India works to create an inclusive learning environment, it is crucial to critically analyze how supportive technology and stakeholder participation might help address these problems.

## 1. Literature Review

### 1.1 Importance of Inclusive Education

Students who get inclusive education benefit in all areas of their development—social, intellectual, and emotional. According to studies, students who attend inclusive schools experience better academic results as well as a sense of community and belonging. For instance, studies published in the Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders in 2021 shown that, in contrast to students in segregated environments, kids with developmental disabilities who receive their education in inclusive classes have greater levels of academic engagement and self-esteem. According to an increasing amount of data, children perform better academically in inclusive environments and have more possibilities to form relationships.

Friendships, social skills, personal values, comfort level with those with special needs, and nurturing educational environments are a few advantages (Singh, 2021). This claim is corroborated by a 2022 UNESCO report, which reiterates that inclusivity improves educational opportunities and combats societal prejudices, encouraging empathy among all pupils (UNESCO, 2022). This beneficial effect emphasizes how urgently an all-encompassing strategy for inclusive education that takes into account both society attitudes and educational practices is needed.

### 1.2 Impact of Supportive Technology

According to McNicholl et al. (2019), assistive technology (AT) is "any product whose primary purpose is to maintain or improve an individual's functioning and independence and thereby promote their wellbeing." Students with visual impairments can benefit from improved socialization and knowledge building opportunities thanks to the descriptive video service, which provides a narrative verbal description of all the visual elements displayed on the screen. Students can automatically hear the descriptions of all the visual elements (Ahmad, 2015).

Academic engagement is significantly impacted by AT. Students with disabilities were found to do better academically when these techniques were used. The advantages of AT for the growth of autonomy and involvement were also mentioned in other articles. The findings indicate a rise in social skill acquisition. Lastly, it's important to note that these resources boost students' motivation and focus (Fernández-Batanero et al., 2022).

Thinker Bell Labs, which created the Annie device, an interactive Braille learning aid that enables visually challenged pupils to learn at their own pace, is a well-known example in India. Such initiatives serve the larger objectives of inclusive education by highlighting the value of supportive technology in encouraging independence and academic success.

### 1.3 Cultural Perceptions and Societal Attitudes

Cultural stigma is still a major obstacle, especially in rural India where exclusion is sometimes caused by false beliefs about impairments. One major obstacle that prevents children with impairments from interacting with other children is the mindset that society holds. Due to lingering outdated beliefs, students from marginalized cultures, those with impairments, and those with learning disorders struggle in school. Poor treatment of students with impairments may lead to favouritism in the classroom. Usually, students with IE should be held accountable rather than the educational system (Guliya et al., 2023).

Community-led awareness campaigns are essential to altering these beliefs, according to research by Patel & Sharma (2023). A non-profit organization called Enable India runs community initiatives that use education to change perceptions and advance inclusivity. Given that 72% of rural households are unaware of the resources available for their children's education, such programs are essential, according to a 2022 study published in the Indian Journal of Disability Studies. It is imperative to address these cultural attitudes in order to promote inclusivity and guarantee the successful implementation of legislative frameworks.

### 1.4 Policy Frameworks and Implementation

The Right to Education (RTE) must be applicable to all Indian citizens. All social actors, including state and federal governments, should understand the significance of an expanded definition of inclusive education that takes into account the various needs of every student.

The Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan for elementary education was introduced in 2000. SSA seeks to guarantee all children between the ages of 6 and 14 receive a high-quality education through the eighth grade. It gives all teachers an orientation to teaching special needs students. In 2009–2010, the Secondary Stage Inclusive Education for Disabled program was introduced. This program offers support for the inclusive education of students with disabilities in classes IX–XII. The program's main goal is to identify secondary-aged disabled children. Each disabled student will receive educational materials, all school infrastructure barriers will be removed for them, and all secondary-aged general school teachers will receive basic training on inclusive education (Ray & Ghanta, 2022).

Despite improvements in policy, there are still large implementation gaps. According to a UNICEF India report from 2023, whereas frameworks like as the NEP 2020 offer a starting point, financing, teacher preparation, and public awareness are necessary for the effective implementation of policies (UNICEF, 2023).

### 1.5 Challenges to implement Inclusive Education in India

Many special education policies have been developed by the government since the nation's independence. Because their parents are struggling financially, students are compelled to drop out of school and labor to support their parents. Physical and psychological impairments are a result of the increasing number of child laborers. The fact that the majority of disabled individuals are still denied equitable access to normal schooling is another significant obstacle. Children with impairments face a far larger problem when it comes to peer acceptance (Singh, 2021).

Children with disabilities are frequently singled out by their peers without impairments for bullying and taunting. Few Indian schools are equipped to accommodate the special needs of kids with disabilities, and the majority of them are badly designed. It's also important to remember that funding and acquiring assistive technology present difficulties. In India, almost 94% of children with disabilities did not receive any educational assistance despite numerous attempts to promote inclusive education (Singh, 2021).

## Conclusion

Technology and policy must promote inclusive education if we are to ensure equitable learning. Despite legislative advancements, there are still implementation gaps in India. Although assistive technology, such as Braille devices and speech-to-text devices, improve learning, their use is restricted by infrastructure, cultural, and economical constraints.

More awareness, thorough teacher preparation, and improved stakeholder engagement are all necessary to close the gap between policy and practice. Accessibility can be further enhanced by increasing funding for the study and creation of reasonably priced assistive technology. In order to ensure that teachers have the necessary abilities to accommodate a variety of learning needs, schools must incorporate inclusive practices into their curriculam.

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