



INCLUSIVE AND EQUITABLE EDUCATION IN INDIA: POLICIES, CHALLENGES, AND PROSPECTS

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RESEARCH ARTICLE



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Abstract

Education that is inclusive and equitable serves as a transformative approach designed to guarantee quality learning opportunities for every student, regardless of their gender, caste, disability, language, or economic status. Based on the ideals of social justice and equality, this paper thoroughly investigates the development, policies, challenges, and future directions of inclusive education within the Indian context. By utilizing secondary data sources, it examines how significant educational policies such as the Right to Education Act (2009), Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan (2018), and the National Education Policy (2020) have influenced India's dedication to equity and inclusion. The research outlines ongoing obstacles, including insufficient teacher training, infrastructural deficiencies, resistant attitudes, and limited involvement from the community that impede effective execution. It also highlights effective strategies such as training for teachers, embracing technology, engaging the community, and using data to inform policy decisions to enhance inclusive practices. The results emphasize that equitable and inclusive education is not just a matter of policy compliance but a moral obligation and a vital need for realizing Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG-4) and promoting a more just, democratic, and unified society. In the end, inclusive education in India represents a shift from exclusion to active participation, ensuring that every student feels appreciated, supported, and empowered to achieve their full potential.

Keywords: *Inclusive Education; Equitable Learning; National Education Policy 2020; Right to Education Act; Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan; Sustainable Development Goal 4*

Introduction

Inclusive education represents a holistic approach that aims to ensure the involvement, engagement, and success of all students within regular educational environments (Ainscow, 2005; Engelbrecht & Green, 2007). It focuses on integrating children with disabilities into standard classrooms catered to all learners, promoting equal access to educational opportunities regardless of physical, intellectual, emotional, or learning differences (Kugelmass, 2004; Loreman et al., 2005). Based on the social values of justice and equality, inclusive education aims to eradicate discrimination and encourage comprehensive development by appreciating the diversity of learners (Norwich, 1996). Instead of simply adding learners with disabilities to pre-existing systems, inclusive education seeks to reshape educational frameworks and teaching methodologies to be adaptable and responsive for everyone (UNICEF, 2009). This innovative approach broadens the definition of education to include diversity, creativity, and teamwork, guaranteeing that every child is recognized and supported. Worldwide, inclusive education is acknowledged as a fundamental element for achieving Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4), which strives to "ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all" (UN, 2015). In India, the commitment to inclusive and equitable education is deeply rooted in key policy documents like the Right to Education Act (2009) and the National Education Policy (2020), reflecting the alignment with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UNESCO, 2017). Inclusive education is a crucial foundation for promoting a fair and equitable society, improving the quality and accessibility of education for all learners. UNICEF (2017) states that an inclusive education system "welcomes all students, offering them a nurturing and supportive learning environment, irrespective of their identities, abilities, or needs." This vision entails creating teaching methods, curriculum designs, infrastructure, and learning materials that are accessible to all children at every level of education (DeBruin, 2019). The National Curriculum Framework (2005) underscores that curriculum development should reflect India's dedication to Universal Elementary Education (UEE) by incorporating cultural, social, and individual diversity. Inclusion, therefore, extends beyond just disability; it embodies a broader concept of human development,

mutual respect, and dignity that encourages the participation of every learner in society. It supports comprehensive development and establishes a learning environment grounded in equality, respect, and collaboration. Inclusive education represents a significant shift from segregated and integrated educational models toward one that values diversity and belonging (Florian, 2014). It fosters the full involvement of all learners, regardless of their differences, within mainstream educational systems. Gupta and Sharma (2018) investigated the implementation of inclusive education in Indian schools, highlighting the challenges encountered by educators, administrators, and policymakers. Their research stresses the necessity of overcoming attitudinal hurdles, ensuring adequate resources, and promoting collaboration among stakeholders to effectively achieve inclusive education. According to Kawaguchi and Kuroda (2013), inclusive education distinguishes itself from integrated education by placing the onus on teachers and schools to adapt and meet children's individual needs, rather than expecting learners to conform to pre-existing systems. In the Indian context, the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 reiterates this shift by guaranteeing that every learner, irrespective of socio-economic status, gender, caste, religion, or ability, is entitled to quality education and the chance to fulfill their potential. To realize this vision, regular and special education teachers must work closely with families and communities to craft effective teaching strategies and inclusive curricula (Sharma, 2014). With appropriate training, support, and resources, the majority of children with special educational needs (SEN) can thrive in mainstream environments. Worldwide, inclusive education gained prominence as a focal point of educational reform movements during the mid-20th century, propelled by advocacy for equity and social justice. By the 1980s, it transformed into a practical framework aimed at dismantling barriers between general and special education, championing equal opportunities, resource equity, and social inclusion. International agreements such as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development reaffirm the significance of inclusive education in promoting social justice and sustainable development. Additionally, Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4) positions inclusive education as vital for lifelong learning, cultural identity, and economic advancement. Despite these global and national commitments, obstacles remain, including attitudinal barriers, insufficient resources, and systemic limitations within educational systems (Hodge & Lewis, 2009). Addressing these challenges is essential for creating inclusive learning environments that embody equity, diversity, and empowerment for all.

Objectives of the Study

1. To analyze the policy framework supporting inclusive and equitable education in India.
2. To identify challenges in implementing inclusive and equitable education policies in India.
3. To suggest strategies for improving the effectiveness of inclusive education policies and practices.
4. To explore prospects and future directions for inclusive and equitable education in India.

Methodology

The research report uses only secondary information as its foundation. The study uses an interpretive methodology, gathering and analyzing qualitative evidence through the documentation of publications, research papers from journals, documents gathered by different authorities and institutions, papers appearing in local, national and worldwide publications and web-based resources.

The Importance of Inclusive and Equitable Education

In order to counteract discriminatory attitudes, create an inclusive society, and achieve education for all, ordinary schools with an inclusive orientation are the most effective, according to UNESCO (1994). Additionally, according to UNICEF's 2003 foreword on inclusive education in India, "70% of children with disabilities, including those with mild mental retardation, can attend regular schools provided the environment is designed to be accessible and the institution is willing to accommodate them." Inclusive and equitable education is essential in today's society because it guarantees that every child, regardless of their background, has an equal opportunity to learn and develop. Numerous students encounter challenges due to factors such as poverty, disabilities, language differences, social caste, or gender discrimination, and these obstacles often hinder their access to quality education. When educational institutions welcome all children without bias, students are more likely to feel valued, respected, and inspired. It is crucial to recognize that learners differ widely some may require additional support, others may need varied teaching approaches, and some may simply take longer to grasp the material. By catering to the unique needs of each student, education becomes fairer and more balanced. Inclusive education not only provides equal chances for those typically overlooked but also fosters understanding and respect among students from diverse backgrounds, promoting unity and collaboration. As the educational gap between students narrows, overall inequality diminishes. In the long term, a well-educated populace contributes to national advancement, as educated individuals tend to be more capable, skilled, and socially responsible. This ultimately promotes improved development, economic growth, and a reduction in poverty. In conclusion, when every child has access to high-quality education, society becomes more robust, stable, and better equipped for future advancements.

Fundamentals of Inclusive and Equitable Education

Inclusive and equitable education is based on a simple belief: every learner deserves a meaningful chance to grow, no matter what their personal, social, or economic situation is. Students do not enter school as identical learners each one has a unique pace of learning, different languages, varied abilities, and their own backgrounds. As a result, it is firmly rooted in the belief that education is a fundamental human right and the foundation for a more just society. Consequently, there is a strong emphasis on

fairness, which encompasses a dedication to impartiality (Ainscow, 2020). Because of these differences, a single fixed method of teaching cannot support everyone. Inclusion therefore focuses on creating learning experiences that adjust to the learner, instead of expecting the learner to adjust to the system. The purpose of inclusion goes beyond placing all children in the same classroom. What truly matters is whether the classroom atmosphere allows every student to participate confidently and without fear. India's educational vision, expressed through the Right to Education Act (2009) and the National Education Policy (2020), promotes this idea by stressing that schools must reach those children who are ignored or excluded due to disability, poverty, gender, or social status. These policies also state that lessons should be flexible so that teaching can accommodate the different ways children understand information. Equity in education is about fair support, not equal treatment. Fairness requires giving each learner what they need extra time, accessible materials, learning aids, or personalised attention so that they can learn at the same level as others. Schools that practise inclusion successfully usually focus on respect, patience, and collaboration. Peer interactions, a supportive teacher, and a non-threatening environment help students feel accepted and valued. To achieve this, teachers must be trained to handle a diverse classroom. They need skills in differentiated teaching, understanding learning difficulties, using digital tools effectively, and planning lessons in several formats. Families and communities also play an important role, as emotional encouragement from home greatly influences the confidence and motivation of children. Government programmes like Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan and Samagra Shiksha further strengthen inclusion by improving training, identifying learning needs early, and offering resources that reduce barriers. In addition, modern assessment practices focus on overall development academic, emotional, and social rather than relying only on exams. Prominent international policy documents underscore that these terms should be embraced as fundamental principles that influence all facets of educational policies (UNESCO, 2017). Globally, documents like the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and Sustainable Development Goal 4 highlight that education is a right, not a privilege. Together, these ideas support a system where diversity becomes a strength, and every child is given a fair opportunity to learn and thrive.

Factors Contributing to Inclusive and Equitable Education

Creating inclusive and equitable education is a gradual, multi-layered process. It does not come from one decision or one policy it develops when several factors work together over time. The first major factor is the policy direction set by governments. Laws such as the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act (2016) and global frameworks like the UNCRPD provide guidelines that encourage schools to make learning spaces accessible to every child. These policies may not change classrooms overnight, but they create a foundation that schools must follow. However, the actual success of inclusion depends on the attitudes and preparation of teachers. Teachers decide how lessons are presented, how students are supported, and how problems are handled in real-time. Research has repeatedly shown that when teachers are trained to understand diverse learning needs, inclusion becomes stronger and more effective. Even small adjustments slowing down explanations, offering alternative tasks, or giving extended time can create big differences in students' learning experiences. Another crucial contributor is the curriculum. A rigid syllabus often disadvantages learners who need flexibility. Approaches such as Universal Design for Learning (UDL), hands-on activities, and real-life examples make learning clearer and more engaging for students with different learning styles. UNICEF also notes that when learning connects to students' daily lives, their interest and comfort increase. Resources and physical infrastructure also shape inclusion. Many barriers arise not from the child but from the environment lack of ramps, absence of digital devices, or insufficient learning materials. When schools provide accessible buildings, assistive technology, and financial support, they reduce inequalities and give all learners a better chance to succeed. Finally, community involvement acts as a powerful support system. Families, local organisations, and community groups help remove stigma and encourage children to stay engaged in schooling. When schools and communities work together, inclusive education becomes more stable and effective in the long run.

Strategies for Enhancing the Effectiveness of Inclusive Education Policies and Practices

Inclusive education can fulfil its true objectives only when policies and practices are applied thoughtfully and continuously enhanced. Genuine inclusion extends beyond merely bringing students into the classroom; it encompasses fairness, meaningful involvement, and empowering every learner to develop with assurance. To improve the efficiency of inclusive education systems, several targeted strategies are vital. One of the most significant measures is enhancing teacher training and ongoing professional development. Educators must possess not only theoretical knowledge but also practical skills that enable them to navigate diverse classrooms, employ differentiated teaching strategies, and support students with a variety of learning needs. Inclusive education impacts not only the principles and types of education offered to students with disabilities but also necessitates a re-evaluation of the overarching goals of education, the role of schools, the content of the curriculum, assessment approaches, and the ways schools adapt to diversity. The manner in which mainstream schools accommodate students with disabilities can serve as a benchmark for the quality of education provided to all students (UNESCO, 2015). When inclusive values are integrated into both pre-service and ongoing training programs, teachers are better equipped to recognize, respect, and celebrate diversity within their classrooms. Equally crucial is the alignment of policies backed by robust accountability mechanisms. National educational policies should align with global frameworks such as the UNESCO Education 2030 Agenda to ensure a consistent and unified approach to inclusion. Clear guidelines, continuous evaluation of policy outcomes, and transparent monitoring systems help minimize the gap between policy formulation and actual application. This alignment is essential to transform inclusive education from an abstract concept into a tangible reality for students and educators. Another vital strategy involves enhancing community and parental involvement. Inclusive education flourishes when families, local organizations, and communities collaborate with

schools. Initiatives like awareness programs, partnerships between parents and schools, and support networks are vital in addressing cultural obstacles and diminishing stigma related to disabilities or socio-economic challenges. When parents take an active role, they become strong advocates for their children and help foster a supportive environment that promotes equal participation for everyone. Accessibility is also a fundamental component of effective inclusion. Schools must guarantee that facilities, educational materials, and technologies are available to every learner. Assistive devices, barrier-free environments, adaptive learning tools, and digital resources enable students with disabilities and learners from marginalized backgrounds to fully engage in the educational process. These provisions help close opportunity gaps and foster equitable learning environments. Weber and Ruch (2012) argue that an effective school benefits all students and works towards the achievement of every learner. This necessitates the adjustment of educational strategies and the learning environment to accommodate the diversity of learners (Agarwal and Chakravarti, 2014). Ultimately, making decisions based on data and adopting research-informed innovations are critical for sustaining advancements. Systematic data gathering about student participation, educational achievements, and support services aids in pinpointing deficiencies and crafting targeted interventions. Promoting educational research, testing new methodologies, and creating innovation hubs empower schools and policymakers to explore new ideas and widely adopt successful models. Through these combined strategies, inclusive education can become more effective, just, and attuned to the diverse needs of learners. Successful implementation ensures that all students, regardless of age, gender, ethnicity, or background, are included and given equal opportunities in the classroom. (Ud Din Bhat & Zahoor Ahmad Geelani, 2018) (Mahlo, 2013).

Effective implementation of inclusive education requires a multi-faceted approach:

1. Policy Development Governments should develop and enforce inclusive education policies that promote equality and provide necessary resources.
2. Teacher Training Comprehensive training programs should be provided to equip teachers with the skills and knowledge to support inclusive classrooms
3. Collaborative Teaching Collaborative teaching models, involving general and special education teachers, can provide better support for diverse learners.
4. Curriculum Adaptation Curricula should be flexible and inclusive, incorporating diverse teaching methods and materials to cater to different learning styles.
5. Community Engagement Engaging the community, including parents and local organizations, can support the effective implementation of inclusive education.

Impact of Inclusive and Equitable Education

Inclusive and equitable education has greatly changed India's learning environment. It has improved access to schooling, encouraged active participation, and created fair learning conditions for every child, regardless of their background, income, or physical ability. By bringing together students from various social and economic groups, including children with disabilities, girls, those from rural areas, and low-income families, this model has helped reduce old inequalities. This shift moves away from the exam-driven and rigid system toward one that values rights, child-centered learning, and diversity as strengths. Education is increasingly seen as a path to social justice. A clear outcome of this approach has been higher school enrolment among disadvantaged groups and a steady decline in dropout rates. Major government initiatives like the Right to Education Act, Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan, and the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 have reinforced these gains by ensuring that children who may have been excluded now remain in school. Classrooms have also transformed into spaces where students learn to respect differences, share experiences, and build empathy. This social learning promotes stronger democratic values and a sense of belonging. For less privileged communities, inclusive education has created access to quality learning, leading to greater confidence, better skills, and improved job opportunities in the future. Teachers have also benefited, as inclusion encourages them to adopt flexible, engaging, and student-focused teaching methods that enhance the overall quality of education. Beyond individual outcomes, inclusive and equitable education supports India's broader aims of social equality, gender fairness, and sustainable development. It is more than just an educational policy; it embodies a moral and social commitment to equality and human dignity. By ensuring that every learner is valued and supported, inclusive education helps create a compassionate, capable, and united society that truly upholds democracy and offers opportunities for all.

Policy framework supporting inclusive and equitable education in India

India's dedication to providing inclusive and equitable education is evident through a range of national policies and programs that strive to guarantee meaningful learning opportunities for every child, regardless of their background. The existence of a strong policy framework promoting inclusive education in India corresponds with past research that emphasizes the nation's commitment to both international agreements and domestic legal responsibilities. The RPWD Act of 2016, the RTE Act of 2009, and the NEP of 2020 together showcase an advanced policy landscape that acknowledges education as a basic right for all children, including those with disabilities. Nevertheless, as indicated by the findings, there is a considerable discrepancy between policy development and actual execution, a conclusion that aligns with other studies regarding educational reforms in India. This gap in implementation can be linked to systemic challenges such as limited resources, poor administrative coordination, and a shortage of accountability measures. The government has recognized and promoted the practice of inclusive education by integrating various international accords into its legislation (Njoka et al., 2012). The policy framework (Republic of Kenya, 2005, 2009, 2012) proposed that all secondary schools establish, design, and execute programs to facilitate inclusive education.

Despite the existence of inclusive education policies, disability continues to be a significant reason for exclusion in educational settings. The research examined the effect of school strategies in addressing physical barriers that hinder the effective implementation of inclusive education within public secondary schools in Kenya. Central to this framework are legal provisions and policy reforms aimed at diminishing educational disparities and fostering supportive environments for learners with various needs. Despite the extensive policy framework, challenges related to execution, resource allocation, and teacher readiness persist, impacting its effectiveness and underscoring the necessity for continual assessment and enhancement. A fundamental aspect of this framework is the Right to Education (RTE) Act, enacted in 2009, which mandates free and compulsory education for all children aged 6 to 14 years. The Act underscores that no child should be denied education due to financial constraints, caste, gender, or disability, representing a vital advancement towards universal access. In addition, the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA), initiated in 2001, aims to achieve universal elementary education with a specific focus on children from socially and economically marginalized communities. SSA has significantly contributed to the expansion of school facilities, increased enrolment rates, and fostered gender equity. At the secondary education level, the Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan (RMSA) endeavours to broaden access to secondary education. This program encompasses special intervention schemes designed to mitigate disparities associated with gender, caste, geographical location, and disability, thereby reinforcing equity at higher education levels. As a result, numerous countries have made significant efforts to develop their educational policies and practices in favor of inclusive education, although doubts have emerged regarding their effectiveness and efficiency (Kalyanpur, 2014; Mukhopadhyay, 2015). While legislation and policies in various nations seem to support inclusive education, the actual practices within schools may not align with this commitment (Ashwini et al., 2015). The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 further solidifies India's commitment to inclusive education. It advocates for reforms in curriculum design, teaching methods, and teacher preparation to create more adaptable learning environments that cater to student diversity. The policy also emphasizes the establishment of support structures for learners with disabilities, children from tribal and rural backgrounds, and other marginalized groups. India has implemented specific initiatives aimed at supporting children with disabilities. Campaigns like the Accessible India Campaign are focused on eliminating physical and systemic obstacles by enhancing school facilities, promoting assistive technologies, and guaranteeing access to learning materials. These efforts align with India's broader vision of developing an education system that values diversity and guarantees equal opportunities for all learners.

Challenges in implementing inclusive and equitable education policies in India

While India has put in place a robust policy framework aimed at fostering inclusive and equitable education, the effective implementation of these policies still encounters numerous ongoing challenges. These obstacles often inhibit the complete realization of inclusion and hinder marginalized learners from taking full advantage of the opportunities that the policies seek to offer. Recognizing these issues is vital for enhancing current initiatives and formulating more impactful strategies. One significant issue pertains to infrastructure and resources. Numerous schools still lack essential facilities necessary for students with disabilities, such as ramps, accessible restrooms, classrooms that accommodate mobility, and suitable learning aids. Without these fundamental supports, schools find it difficult to establish environments where all students can engage comfortably and safely. Individuals such as children, parents, families, educators, and education officials all belong to communities. There has been a deficiency in community engagement and collaborative efforts between governmental bodies and NGOs to advance inclusive education. According to UNESCO (2010), societal perceptions pose a challenge to equitable education for individuals in India. Studies show that unfavourable attitudes towards people with disabilities can result in diminished expectations, which subsequently may lead to fewer learning opportunities (Sharma, Forlin, Loreman and Earle, 2006). Preparedness of teachers presents another considerable challenge. Although policies highlight the importance of inclusion, many educators have not received sufficient training in inclusive teaching methods, adapting classrooms, and utilizing assistive technologies. Most schools in India are inadequately designed, and very few cater to the specific needs of students with disabilities. Some believe that the absence of disability-friendly transportation and inaccessible facilities poses greater challenges than societal biases and negative attitudes. Additionally, architectural barriers, such as the lack of ramps and accessible restrooms, create significant obstacles since school infrastructure often lacks these basic amenities. Regarding school management, rigid teaching methods and curricula hinder the inclusion of special materials and techniques in regular classrooms. The existing curriculum does not offer the necessary flexibility to accommodate the requirements of students with disabilities. There are also limited developmentally appropriate teaching and learning resources available for both disabled and non-disabled children. The process of teaching and learning only partially addresses the individual educational needs of students. Therefore, it can be summarized that insufficient physical facilities and inclusive infrastructure for individuals with disabilities, inadequate training for teachers—whether in pre-service or in-service contexts—to “meet the learning needs of all children, including those who are marginalized and disabled” (Julka, 2012), a lack of pedagogical research for effective inclusive teaching strategies, an absence of an inclusive culture and practices in educational institutions, insufficient “knowledge about various impairments... and their impact on the learning process” (Auluck, 2012), and a shortage of specialized co-educators in schools are all pressing concerns. Gillies & Carrington (2004) emphasize the urgent need to reevaluate attitudes, organizational structures, curricula, and teaching practices in order to facilitate the inclusion of all children in education. This deficiency hampers their capability to cater to diverse learning requirements and restricts the practical application of inclusive practices in daily classroom settings. India's socioeconomic disparities exacerbate these challenges further. Issues such as poverty, child labour, gender norms, early marriage, and social discrimination continue to obstruct many children especially girls, those from rural areas, and lower-caste groups from enrolling in or finishing school. These systemic problems directly conflict with the objectives of equitable and inclusive education. Even

when access has improved, the quality of education remains inconsistent. Schools that are under-resourced, staffed by untrained personnel, or faced with overcrowding frequently struggle to offer meaningful learning experiences. Consequently, while children may physically attend schools, their academic achievements often do not align with the promised equitable opportunities. The necessity for psychological and emotional support is also largely unmet. Students from disadvantaged or vulnerable backgrounds frequently need counselling, socio-emotional assistance, and safe environments to share their feelings. However, many schools lack trained counsellors or adequate support systems to effectively address these requirements. Lastly, shortcomings in data collection and monitoring lead to additional complications. The absence of reliable, disaggregated data concerning marginalized populations such as children with disabilities, tribal groups, and out-of-school youths hinders policymakers from crafting targeted interventions and adjusting programs based on genuine needs. In summary, these challenges underline the disparity between policy aspirations and the realities on the ground. Tackling these issues is crucial for ensuring that India's aspiration for inclusive and equitable education results in meaningful and enduring improvements for all learners.

Prospects and future directions for inclusive and equitable education in India

The future of inclusive and equitable education in India hinges on ongoing dedication, thoughtful innovation, and evidence-based reforms that can better meet the diverse needs of learners. As the nation works to widen access to schooling, the current challenge is to enhance the quality and inclusivity of classroom experiences. Inclusive education necessitates that generalist teachers address the varied academic, social, and cultural needs of a diverse student body (Rose, 2010), as well as for school leaders to embrace and commit to this philosophy (Kibria, 2005). As we move forward, India's advancement will depend on well-crafted policies that are consistently executed across different regions. Effective monitoring and evaluation systems will be essential in closing the gap between policy objectives and actual practice, ensuring every child benefits from the support indicated in legislative frameworks. An essential part of this progress will entail investing in the professional development of teachers. Educators need training not only in inclusive teaching methods but also in grasping the emotional and psychological aspects of learning. When instructors are trained to identify individual needs, adjust curriculum materials, and offer personalized guidance, classrooms become more inviting and accommodating for all students, including those with disabilities and various learning challenges. Technology will also play a crucial role in future advancements. Assistive technologies, multilingual digital resources, and blended learning approaches can help eliminate obstacles related to disabilities, geographic remoteness, or limited educational resources. Digital tools hold the promise of making learning more adaptable and accessible, particularly for children needing additional support. Enhanced community and parental involvement will further boost the likelihood of successful inclusion. When families, local organizations, and community members actively engage in school initiatives and decision-making processes, they foster a collective responsibility towards children's education. This engagement helps diminish stigma, promotes consistent attendance, and nurtures a culture of acceptance both inside and outside the classroom. Future strategies in India must prioritize comprehensive support systems within schools. By incorporating health services, nutrition programs, counselling, and social welfare measures, we can tackle the multiple challenges faced by at-risk children. These services ensure that learning occurs in a supportive environment that accounts for children's physical, emotional, and social requirements. In summary, these future directions present a vision of an educational system in India that prioritizes diversity, enhances equity, and guarantees that every child regardless of ability or background has the chance to learn, engage, and succeed in mainstream education.

Educational Implications of Inclusive and Equitable Education

Inclusive and equitable education basically means that every child should get a fair chance to learn, no matter what their background is or how they learn. It is not just some government rule; it is more like a belief that all children deserve respect and proper education (UNESCO, 2020). This idea changes many things in schools, like what teachers teach, how they teach, how students are tested, and how the school environment feels. Because of inclusion, the curriculum cannot be too fixed. A strict syllabus often helps only a few students. Others struggle because they need different ways to understand lessons. So, schools try to use different methods videos, activities, discussions, reading so that every child can learn in their own way. The UDL approach also suggests giving students various ways to show what they know (UDL Framework, 2018). When books include different cultures and languages, students feel recognised. Teachers also play a huge role here. They need good training so they can understand different learning needs and adjust their teaching accordingly (NEP, 2020). Many teachers also need short workshops from time to time because classrooms keep changing. When teachers are confident with new methods, students feel supported. Traditional exams do not always show the real abilities of children. Some students cannot memorize well, some learn slowly, and some express themselves better through activities. That is why inclusive education prefers projects, small tasks, portfolios, and regular feedback instead of only one big exam (UNESCO, 2020). These methods give students a fairer chance. The school environment matters a lot too. Students must feel safe and welcome. Group work, peer support, anti-bullying efforts, and talking openly with parents all help create a more positive atmosphere. When students feel that they belong in the school, they learn better and behave better. Policies also support inclusion. The RTE Act (2009) and NEP 2020 talk about equal access, teacher training, scholarships, and using technology in learning (RTE Act, 2009; NEP, 2020). But policies need proper funding and resources good classrooms, materials, trained teachers so that schools can support all children properly. Finally, inclusive education has a social impact too. When children from different backgrounds sit together, they learn to understand and respect each other. They slowly become more sensitive and open-minded. This helps society become more fair and cooperative in the long run (UNESCO, 2020).

Conclusion

Inclusive and equitable education in India is not just a reform agenda; it is a slow and continuous shift in the way we understand schooling and learning. The idea is simple: every child, no matter where they come from or what their abilities are, deserves a classroom where they feel accepted and supported. Policies like the RTE Act, the NEP 2020, and international goals such as SDG-4 show that the country recognises this responsibility. Still, having these policies on paper does not automatically create inclusion inside schools. In reality, many obstacles continue to get in the way. Some schools do not have enough resources, some communities still hold narrow views about disability and diversity, and many teachers have never received proper training in inclusive practices. Monitoring systems also remain weak, so gaps often go unnoticed. Because of this, inclusion cannot be achieved by the government alone it needs cooperation from everyone involved in education. If teachers get the right support, if schools improve their physical and learning environments, and if families and communities participate actively, then the barriers begin to break. Small changes like flexible teaching methods, better communication between school and home, and a welcoming attitude can create a large difference in the long run. When inclusion works the way, it should, it lifts up those who are usually left behind and, at the same time, helps society grow kinder, more aware, and more democratic. In the end, building an inclusive system is not only a policy duty; it is a moral choice and a social investment. It moves India closer to a future where education genuinely becomes a source of equality, strength, and lifelong opportunity for everyone.

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