

Addressing The Challenges Of Inclusive Education And Bridging The Implementation Gap To Meet The Diverse Learning Needs

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Abstract:

Inclusive education is globally accepted (UNESCO, 1994) for implementation. Still, there is some resistance to inclusive education throughout the world. This article discusses the challenges faced and the possible solutions for the successful implementation of Inclusive Education.

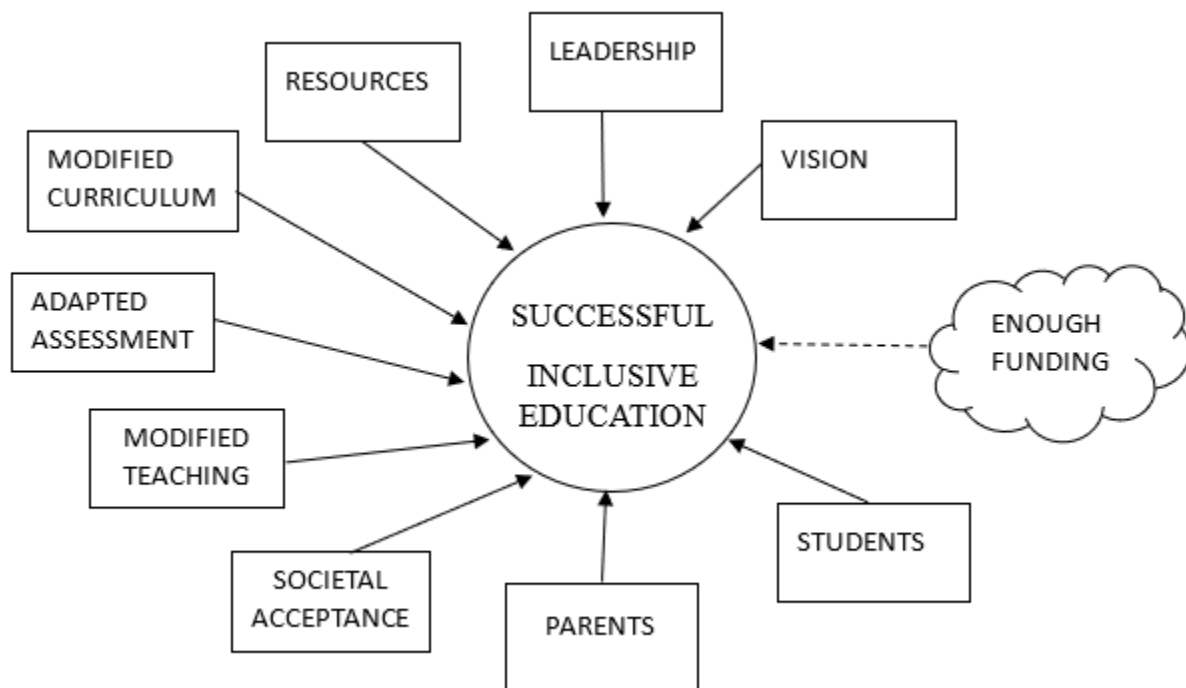
Keywords: Inclusive Education, Special Education, Co-teaching.

Inclusive Education:

Disability is one of the most challenging barriers to education across the globe. According to UNICEF, (UNICEF, 2021) there are 240 million children with disabilities worldwide. Like neurotypical children, these children with disabilities also have ambitions and need quality education to develop their skills and realize their full potential (Hornby & Kauffman, 2021.)

More than 40 years of intense debate (Hornby & Kauffman, 2021) about how best to educate children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) has led to the evolution of special education and inclusive education. Inclusive education refers to a setting in which neurodiverse and neurotypical children are in the same classrooms in the same school, where equitable academic and social participation is made possible, without any barriers. Inclusive education gained momentum due to liberalization during President Reagan in the USA in the 1980s. Inclusive education is also known as Universal education or integrated education. Though Inclusive Education (IE) has been globally accepted (UNESCO, 1994) for implementation, there is still resistance to implementing inclusive education in schools worldwide.

FACTORS ESSENTIAL FOR SUCCESSFUL INCLUSIVE EDUCATION PROGRAMS



Materials and Methods:

A systematic search and review of the studies on Inclusive Education was carried out to answer the research questions,

1. What are the challenges of Inclusive Education?
2. What are the solutions to the challenges for inclusive education?

We aimed to conduct a systematic and comprehensive search of the relevant literature. After discussing with all the co-authors using the different databases and using the keyword search terms "Inclusive Education," "Special educational needs," and "education," 216 articles were selected. Twenty-five articles that remained after removing duplicates, and articles not relevant to the two research questions, using PRISMA selection, were read thoroughly and analyzed.

Challenges of Inclusive Education:

The issues and challenges in the successful implementation of inclusive education are as follows:

1. Attitude of Parents of neurotypical and neuro diverse students
2. Lack of Transportation facilities for students with disabilities
3. Involvement of Local Community
4. Attitudes of General Education and Special Education Teachers and their Training
5. Perspective of General Education Students
6. Attitudes of Students with Disability
7. Resources provided for Inclusive Education
8. Large Class sizes

1. Attitude of Parents of neurotypical and neurodiverse students:

Support from parents of children with disabilities is of utmost importance. There is clear evidence that many of these children make more significant progress in a special school's sheltered and expert environment. Some parents have reported transferring to Special Education Schools where experts can appropriately cater to their child's needs (Lauchlan & Greig, 2015).

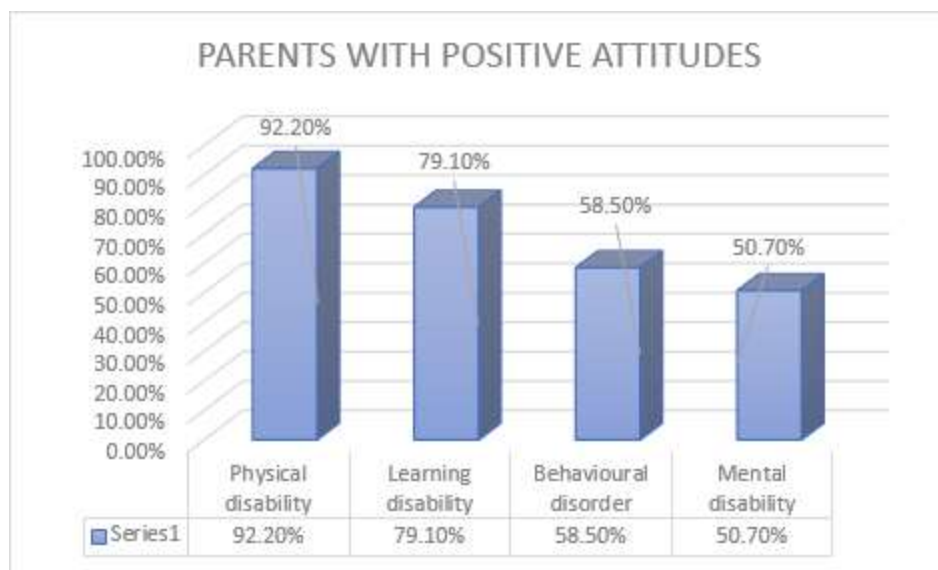
An inclusive curriculum needs strong parental involvement (Mathew & Jha, 2015). The first push for inclusion, primarily by parents, was in Germany (Paseka & Schwab, 2020). Parents could choose special schools or traditional schools with inclusive

education. Parents, in general, have a positive or neutral attitude toward inclusive education. Nevertheless, parents agree that inclusive education benefits all children (Paseka & Schwab, 2020).

Parents, especially working parents, feel relieved when their child with disabilities is left in school. In the US, a minimum amount of parental involvement in the IEP process is legally required. Since many parents may not know about special education, educators tend to insist that they are the experts who should make the decisions (Fish, 2008). Hence, many parents feel left out of the decision-making process (Fish, 2008).

Parent attitudes towards inclusive education (n = 418) (Paseka & Schwab, 2020):

Sl. No.	Kind of Disability	% of parents with a negative attitude	% of parents with a positive attitude
1	Inclusion of students with physical disabilities	7.2	92.2
2	Inclusion of students with learning disabilities	18.8	79.1
3	Inclusion of students with behavioral disorders	38.4	58.5
4	Inclusion of students with mental disabilities	44.7	50.7



Parents' educational level and socio-economic status influence their attitude towards inclusive education. The higher the education level, socio-economic status, and prior experience with inclusion, the more positive the parental attitude toward inclusion (Boer et al., 2010). Educators in Title 1 (economically underprivileged) schools struggle to bring these parents to IEP meetings.

2. Lack of Transportation Facilities:

Providing transportation is a challenge to inclusive education, mainly when the child is physically disabled and uses a wheelchair or crutches. But the lack of suitable transportation facilities in certain countries hampers their access to education with dignity and equity. Providing transportation facilities for children with disabilities is crucial to implementing inclusive education successfully.

3. Involvement of local community/Society:

School-community partnerships are meaningful relationships built between the school and the community members, organizations, and businesses committed to working cooperatively with shared responsibility (Willems & Gonzalez-DeHass, 2012). This partnership improves students' intellectual, social, and emotional well-being. Developing authentic, trusting relationships with the local community is germane to establishing effective school-community partnerships.

Society as a Whole:

According to (UNESCO, 1994), "The greatest barriers to inclusion are caused by society, not by medical impairments." Inclusive education develops a sense of cooperation, collaboration, and togetherness, promoting social acceptance, peace, and teamwork.

Families of students with disabilities need to be integrated into the community. This integration increases understanding and acceptance in society. Inclusive education promotes social inclusion meaning that people, irrespective of disabilities, have the best opportunities to enjoy life, be respected, and do well in society. Social inclusion is vital for a person's dignity, security, and opportunity to lead a better life. Inclusive education promotes social inclusion, participation, cohesion, and integration and avoids social exclusion at the local level.

4. Attitudes of General Education and Special Education Teachers and their training:

Teachers play a vital role in implementing Inclusive Education (Ainscow & Florian, 2013). However, most teachers have positive attitudes toward the ideology and principles of inclusive education but are hesitant and concerned about the implementation part (Moberg et al., 2020). Many hesitate over their competency since they doubt the adequacy of their pre-service training. Teachers believe their ability to teach is reduced by focusing on students with additional needs at the expense of other neurotypical students (Forlin et al., 2008). Teachers do not feel competent and confident in teaching students with special needs (de Boer et al., 2011).

In a study reviewing teacher attitudes in Finland and Japan (Moberg et al., 2020), Finland teachers were more critical than Japanese teachers on the need for inclusive education.

Teachers' attitudes towards Inclusive Education are based on the type of disability of the students. Teachers with experience in IE have more positive attitudes than those with less experience (Kalyva et al., 2007). Students with Emotional and Behavioral Disorders (EBD) and intellectual disabilities are of more concern to teachers compared to students with physical disabilities, learning difficulties, or sensory issues (Moberg et al., 2020).

Challenges of Special Education Teachers (APTTI, 2021):

1. Feeling unappreciated even with knowledge from special education courses
2. Piling of paperwork starting from IEP, progress reports, and lesson plans
3. Lack of support/appreciation from parents of children with disabilities
4. Lack of support from the public in general
5. Teaching special needs children is more challenging as each student has different learning needs and a different pace of learning
6. Working with paraprofessionals preparing the schedules, and attending to their opinions
7. Catering to a diverse group of students with a wide range of disabilities
8. Collaboration with other teachers

9. Scheduling and rescheduling
10. Collecting and analyzing data
11. Monitoring student growth

Teachers in inclusion classrooms:

Untrained teachers placed in inclusive classrooms for middle school mathematics classes have quit their jobs due to the frequent outbursts of the students with behavioral and mental disorders and resulting disruptions to the education of the other students.

Professional development training programs should support teachers by equipping them with data-based practices (Loreman et al., 2014) derived after direct and systematic contact with special needs students. Moberg et al. 2020 (Moberg et al., 2020) suggest that teachers be exposed to IE early, emphasizing collaborative teaching and lesson planning during both pre-service and in-service training and education of teachers.

Co-teaching is an effective model for teaching students with and without disabilities. (Fluijt et al., 2016) defines co-teaching as multiple professionals working together in a co-teaching team, with a shared vision, in a structured manner, during an extended period in which they are equally responsible for good teaching and good learning to all the students in their classroom, irrespective of disability.

Teaching assistants' roles should be restricted to supplemental teacher-designed instruction and clerical duties, material preparation, personal care, and group supervision. This delegation of responsibilities will enable general and special educators to collaborate and spend more time directly instructing students with disabilities.

International Conference on Education, Inclusive Education: The Way of the Future (UNESCO International Bureau of Education, 2008) identified teacher education as critical for the future development of Inclusive Education. In calling upon the International Community to adopt inclusive education to achieve the Education for All (EFA) goals, it recommended six actions specific to teacher education and development (UNESCO IBE, 2011).

- 1) Reinforcing the Role of Teachers

- 2) Training teachers
- 3) Providing adequate resources to teachers
- 4) Encouraging innovative research in teaching and learning processes related to inclusive education
- 5) Equipping school administrators with the required skills
- 6) Protecting the learners, teachers, and schools in times of conflict

5. Perspective of General Education Students:

Most studies show neutral or positive effects on the learning of children without disabilities in inclusion classrooms (Webster, 2021). A review by (Kalambouka et al., 2007) found that out of the 26 studies conducted across four countries, 23% showed positive gains, and 58% showed no impact on academic outcomes. Fewer than 19% of the studies reported negative effects on education, but a positive impact on social and emotional development, reduction in discriminatory attitudes, and higher responsiveness to the needs of others. Exposure to diversity and difference at school leads to positive societal attitudes towards disability over the longer term.

General education students can also be assigned the role of peer tutors or mentors of students with disabilities. This role enhances the learning of students with disabilities and the general education students.

According to Sharma and Mahapatra (2007), the benefits experienced by general education students in inclusive education are an increase in the understanding and appreciation of diversity, mutual friendships, and respect for neurodiverse students, resulting in an inclusive society in the future (Sharma & Mahapatra, 2007).

Cooperative learning is another method in which students with and without disabilities work and learn together in groups, and peer tutoring is where the students teach each (Vroey et al., 2016).

6. Attitudes of Students with Disability:

Regarding learning, research studies (Webster, 2021) found more significant academic gains for children with a range of special needs (typically mild to moderate) who are educated in inclusive

classrooms rather than in separate special education schools. Also, positive effects are more pronounced in primary schools than in secondary schools. Gains were reported in the context of both language and mathematics, but more with language.

A large-scale review found positive personal/social outcomes for children with disabilities. Gains were social engagement, greater peer acceptance, fewer behavior issues, and more participation in school and community groups. They gained greater independence and social skills (Webster, 2021).

Aster Van Mieghem (2020) stated that Students with Special needs benefitted in the following ways from inclusion: - reduction of inappropriate or undesirable behaviors, a higher rate of accomplishment of learning goals, social inclusion, development of friendships, increased socialization, and learning new skills (Van Mieghem et al., 2020.)

Social participation refers to developing mutual positive social contact, interaction, acceptance, and friendships between students and their special needs peers (Bossaert et al., 2013).

7. Resources provided for Inclusive Education:

The movement towards inclusive education is evident in different education systems internationally; various funding models and modes of distributing resources can be observed. It is essential to consider both different funding modes on the policy-making level and how resources are allocated within schools (Goldan et al., 2022). Inadequate funding will hinder special education teachers' ongoing professional development and general education teachers' training on the latest special education practices.

8. Large class sizes:

It is challenging for teachers to give individual attention in a large class of students with a variety of disabilities ranging from learning disability, to ADHD, sensory impairments, etc. The Illinois State Board of Education's Special education Department, mandates the 70/30 class composition rule which mandates that the Inclusion Classrooms should have 70% of general education students and 30% of Students with Disabilities (NeuroHealthAH, 2022). Though many US states follow the 70/30 rule, which is the general guideline, classes sometimes go up to 50/50.

Summary and Conclusion:

As it is supported by UNICEF & UNESCO, Inclusive education has come to stay. The USA, UK, Australia, India, Germany, Italy, China, Taiwan, Turkey, and many European countries have implemented inclusive education in their countries as directed by the UN.

It is observed that inclusive education is more efficient in many aspects. It has been proven that IE benefits students, parents, and promotes an inclusive society.

Inclusive education implies a shared responsibility of all school team members. Further successful implementation needs a shared vision with predefined goals toward inclusive education (Theoharis & Causton, 2014.) Inclusive education for students with disabilities can be made more efficient with additional support from general education teachers and non-disabled peers.

In conclusion, the goals of both special education and inclusive education should both be accomplished without compromising one for the other. A promising way forward is the right combination of general education versus special education while making it as inclusive as possible. Overall, Inclusive Education can succeed only when the teachers implementing it have the positive attitude and also the skills necessary for implementation. There needs to be simultaneous support, at the policy level, both at the Government and at the school, for implementing a successful Inclusion Education Program.

Recommendations for Successful Implementation of Inclusive Education based on current research findings:

After a thorough and in-depth review of the various challenges and solutions for the implementation of Inclusive Education, the following strategies have been recommended:

1. Include modules or papers about Inclusive Education as part of Teacher Preparation Programs.
2. Introduce practicum training and integrate field experiences in successfully functioning IE classrooms, explicitly focusing on attitude, knowledge, and skills for student teachers.
3. Provide Continuing Professional development and In-service training for teachers currently working in Inclusive Education on the academic needs of specific disabilities, in addition to generic Inclusive Education.

4. Provide manuals of Research-driven and data-based inclusion strategies used in high-achieving inclusion classrooms after conducting or reviewing Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses on Inclusive Education.
5. Expose Inclusion teachers to case studies of high-functioning Inclusion classrooms.
6. Try to include a minority of students with mild disabilities like Specific Learning Disabilities, Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder, and Sensory Impairments in the Inclusion Classrooms.
7. Ensure that the personality of teachers who co-teach in inclusion classrooms are matched to enable a collaborative and peaceful class climate.
8. Hold the General Education and Special Education teachers equally accountable for student performance, behavior, and test scores.
9. Facilitate periodical Collab Camps between co-teachers to build rapport and resolve possible differences.
10. Provide a common planning time for co-teachers to enable co-planning, co-teaching, co-assessment, and reflection.
11. Have frequent evaluations of IE classrooms and provide feedback for improving further.
12. Assign paraprofessionals to tough and challenging IE classrooms to help with supplemental teacher-designed instruction, clerical duties, material preparation, personal care, and small group supervision.
13. Conduct ice-breaker sessions to create fellowship and bonding between the typically developing and neurodiverse learners.
14. Assign Peer mentors to facilitate cooperative learning and peer-tutoring of struggling students for remedial teaching and reinforce concepts taught.
15. Assign mentor teachers or peer buddies to help teachers struggling through inclusion education.
16. Offer awareness camps to parents and families of students with disabilities to create a positive and open mindset of the family and society toward Inclusive Education.
17. Enlist the support of Behavior Interventionists to handle challenging and disruptive behaviors in the classroom, using Functional Behavioral Assessment, Behavior Intervention Plans, etc.

18. Use mental health counselors' help to alleviate behavioral and underlying psychological issues.
19. Utilize wheelchair-accessible bus transportation for children with physical impairments and handicaps to ensure mobility from home to school and vice-versa.
20. Device ways and means of lessening the workload of special education teachers (drafting IEPs, Lesson plans, progress reports, etc.) must be figured out. Inviting the parents and others to the IEP meeting can be delegated to office staff. Unless the workload of special education teachers is reduced, they will not be able to manage and effectively teach special kids.
21. Allocate resources and funds at the federal, state, county, and school levels for teacher professional development and other facilities to support inclusion.
22. Promote peer-mediated intervention strategies to improve reading, writing, and math skills.
23. Facilitate social interactions and relationships between students with special needs and their non-disabled peers.
24. Prevention of bullying, alienation, and social exclusion of students with disabilities should be enforced.
25. Create an overall school climate of shared responsibility and accountability for successfully implementing Inclusion Programs at the level of the teachers, interventionists, instructional coaches, and administrators.
26. Ensure provision of the necessary Accommodations and Modifications as mandated by the Individualized Education Plan (IEP) of the Student with Disabilities in their Least Restrictive Environment (LRE).

Directions for future research:

Future research should focus on the attitudes of the school leaders or administrators towards inclusion education. The school leaders can make resources available for students and also help with the proper implementation of Inclusive education. Secondly, a vast majority of the focus on the training for Special Education and General Education teachers should be through learning communities in the classroom including the co-teachers and under the guidance of the instructional coaches or the special education specialists. Finally, the availability of financial resources to ensure successful implementation of inclusive education need to be

explored. Precisely, the attitude of all students, those with and without disabilities, teachers, administrators and the academic gains of both the groups of students need to be studied in an in-depth manner for the successful execution of Inclusion Education Programs.

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Conflict of Interests

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