



FROM SOCIAL EXCLUSION TO INCLUSION: THE HISTORICAL EVOLUTION OF INCLUSIVE EDUCATION IN INDIA.

Dr. Vinod Kumar

MVCE, Delhi University

Paper Received On: 20 MAR 2026

Peer Reviewed On: 24 APRIL 2026

Published On: 01 MAY 2026

Abstract

*Inclusivity is a fundamental philosophy which should be adopted by each school by ensuring an equitable and quality education for all children irrespective of the diversity dimensions among them. A school is said to be inclusive when students with diverse abilities, linguistic differences, socio economic or other cultural differences, belonging to varied geographic areas, belonging to different social strata, religion, caste, race, gender etc receive opportunities for full and equitable participation in learning and development. The research article mainly provides a detailed historical analysis of how the education of children with special need has evolved from time to time in India .In India the education of children with the disabilities come across through several stages which ultimately faces several challenges in and outside of the school environment .This study ultimately focused on its journey in three distinct phases such as Pre-independence period, Post-Independence and the Contemporary era of mainstream inclusive education. The paper highlights the unique principles of safeguarding and promoting **Education for All** within the mainstream school environment to ensure true equity.*

Key words: *Exclusion, Segregation, Integration, Inclusion, Children with Special Needs (CWSN), Inclusive Policy, Inclusive culture, Inclusive practice.*

INTRODUCTION

Education is the basic right of every child. It is considered as a powerful mechanism for social change especially promoting the up-word movement of any group in the social structure. Education actually helps in bridging the gap between different sections in the society. Right from the period of ‘Gurukul System’, Indian society gave importance to education especially school education. This was reflected in the country’s education policy, programmes and the various sections in our constitution aimed at safe guarding and promoting ‘*Education for All*’, the philosophy behind this being perceiving school as a place where children interact among each other formally or informally irrespective of their religion, caste, culture, economic

background, abilities/disabilities, status etc. for several decades The educational arena in India for the children with disabilities was clearly defined by its invisibility and silence. In ancient society the person with the physical or intellectual differences were often identified through the lens of Karma, charity or through medical model leading to their regular exclusion from normal life. Formal education was considered as an honour for an able-bodied children so that children with disabilities were segregated in their homes.

Today India moves through a critical historical crossroads backed by the ambitious goal of the National Education Policy 2020. The country has successfully formulated a legal framework from a social exclusion to total inclusion. After independence the central and the state government implemented several Centrally sponsored programmes centrally sponsored programmes for the Uplift event of the education of children with the disabilities Still there are Millions of children with disabilities continue to encounter infrastructural barriers, a lack of trained formal teachers , Special educators , assistive technology and other stakeholders Understanding this historical path is most important to deal with the exact problem of children with disability in the mainstream school environment and also assist in building a truly equitable classroom for the future.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

- 1 Understanding the historical development in the education of children with disability help in avoiding the mistakes which was happened in the past while implementing the central and state sponsored programmes for promoting the inclusion of children with disabilities in mainstream school environment.
2. Improving the current school atmosphere by removing the barriers for the free movement of children with disabilities.
3. Enhancing the active participation of parent teachers association and mother teachers association for enhancing the education of all children in the School especially the children with the disabilities.
4. Studying the historical data in the education of children with disabilities help the policy makers to frame new policies that will safeguard the interest of all children.

PRE-INDEPENDENCE PERIOD

The status of disable children in pre-independence period in India was grossly pathetic. From the ancient period, 'disability' was stigmatized and often considered as a result of past sins or a curse. This belief created a negative attitude among the society towards the education and

Copyright © 2026, Scholarly Research Journal for Interdisciplinary Studies

socialization of children with disability. Mostly the parents kept their disabled child within the four walls of their home. In case of family get together or festivals the disabled child was kept away from the purview of the mainstream society. So, children with disability lacked opportunity for any socialization. To start with there were only special schools for these children and that too only for blind, deaf and intellectually impaired children. Thus, children with disability get very rare opportunity to be educated except those children from educated and elite family, as there are only very few special schools in the country. In ancient time 'Kautilya' banned both verbal as well as non-verbal abuse towards disabled person by passing a law. During the Mughal and British period no provision or legislation were found. The first initiative during the British period is in 1818 when the Calcutta School Society was established. One of the most important aims of this society is to provide education for CWSN. A school for deaf and dumb children was established in Calcutta in the year 1829 under this society. The first Blind School was established in the country in 1836 at Calcutta. This was established by William Taylor, a British missionary with the support of East India Company. The Royal Indian Asylum for the deaf and dumb was established in Bombay in the year 1883. A group of British Philanthropist started this special school for educating children with speech and hearing impairment. In Amritsar, in Punjab the first Indian School for the Blind was established in 1902 by an Indian Philanthropist named Bhai Viv Singh. The Indian Research Fund Association (IRFA) which later became The Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) was established in the year 1910. This council conducted various researches in different aspects of disability and also gave grants for initiatives for the education of CWSN.

The Montessori education method was introduced in India in the year 1919 and was useful especially for the education of CWSN. The Central Institute for Research and Training in the field of mental retardation was established in 1942 for giving training to professionals, resource persons and teachers in the field of intellectual disability. The Sargent Report (1944) gave due emphasis to the education of children with disability, 'The Integration of CWSN in general schools' discussed in this report can be said as a major turning point in the area of education of CWSN which was also an important emphasis given in Kothari Commission of 1964-66. The Sargent report recommended that the provision of CWSN should be an integral part of the national system of education and should come under the purview of Department of Education and a ten percent of the total budget allocation for the basic and high school education had been set aside for the educational service of the CWSN.

POST- INDEPENDENCE PERIOD

Education is considered as the fundamental human right of all citizen of the country and a key driver for the overall indicator of the progress, social inclusion and empowerment.

There have been many efforts in the area of education of children with disability in the independent India. In India education of all children is compulsory by law and considered as the basic necessity of every human being. The Article 45 of the Indian Constitution stated that ‘all states shall provide free and compulsory education to all children between 6 to 14 years. For achieving this, education of all children including those with disabilities is important either in the regular schools or special schools. The Article 21A (Eighty Sixth Amendment Act 2002) of our constitution states that education for all children in the age group of 6 to 14 years is free and compulsory and it is a fundamental right in such a manner as the state may, by law, determine.

As per Chapter II Article 3(i) – ‘Every child of the age of 6 -14 years has a right to free and compulsory education in a neighborhood school till completion of elementary education’. Further, this Act lays down, ‘Provided that a child suffering from disability as defined in clause (i) of Section 2 of the Persons with Disabilities (Equal Opportunities, Protection and full Participation) Act 1996, shall have this right in accordance with the provisions of Chapter V of the said Act.

Article 26 of the declaration proclaims the right of every citizen to an appropriate education regardless of gender, colour, race and religion. The Article 29(2) of the Indian constitution states that no citizen/ child shall denied admission into any institution/ school which is maintained by the State Government or receiving state funds. This means children with disability have equal right to receive education in regular schools like other children. The school/ institution cannot deprive the child of his right unless there are compelling reasons to do so. The Right to Education Act was passed in the year 2009 and came into force in the year 2010. The Honorable Supreme Court upheld the constitutional validity of this Act on April 12, 2012. So, all types of children belonging to the 6 to 14 age group shall have the right to free and compulsory education in neighborhood school. The Unnikrishnan Judgement (1993) also strongly supported that ‘every child of this country has a right to free education until he completes the age of 14 years.

In India more than 20 percentage of all children (approximately 65 million) still remain out of school. The UN report 2015 mentioned that about 34% of CWSN are out of school. The percentage of dropout is very high among children with multiple disabilities, girl child having

Copyright © 2026, Scholarly Research Journal for Interdisciplinary Studies

disability, child with speech disorders and intellectual disabilities. In order to tackle this alarming problem which stands as hurdle in attaining the aims and objectives of Universalization of Elementary Education (UEE), Government of India developed and adopted inclusive culture and policies in every school after the Salamanca Declaration. The Salamanca statement was adopted in the world conference on special education conducted at Salamanca Spain in the year 1994. The Salamanca statement is widely accepted as a guiding document that which laid the foundation of all inclusive policies and practices which is beneficial for all policy makers, educators and all other stakeholders of inclusive education in the world. According to this statement every child has the fundamental right to education beside of their abilities or disabilities. Every school should be able to accept and accommodate all type of children especially children with disability and satisfies their diverse learning needs within the regular school environment. Now inclusive schools are growing as a potential place for promoting and protecting education and human rights of children with disability. Inclusive policy is framed in such a way that the barriers can be overcome and is aimed at providing quality and equitable education which is accessible for all. In other words, inclusive education includes disabled children in regular classrooms which is designed and maintained for children with disability giving them opportunities for equal participation as the other children to use their potential optimally to reach their goals.

In the current Indian educational scenario, our resources and infrastructure facilities are not sufficient to provide quality education. So universal enrolment, access and retention of girl child, education of children from poor socio-economic level and Adivasi population and education of children with disability are largely affected. Our constitution envisages free and compulsory education for all children up to the age of 14. But still 17.4 percent were found not attending any schools in the age of 5 to 14 (National Sample Survey (NSS), data of 2004-05). The 78th national sample survey conducted in (2020 -2021) by the ministry of statistics and program implementation MOSPI reported that 32.6 percentage in urban and 33 percentage in rural area were not in education. For bridging this gap and for attaining the specific goals of universalization of elementary education, various centrally sponsored schemes were introduced by the government of India such as DPEP, SSA, Minimum Level of Learning (MLL), Operation Black board, non-formal education programme, etc. In all centrally sponsored and state sponsored programmes due weight is given to the education of CWSN because of the following reasons:

- a. The goals of 'Education for All' cannot be accomplished without early identification in assessment and inclusion of children with disability in mainstream education.
- b. The elementary school in any locality becomes the natural choice for education of any child and needs to suit the needs of all children with disability.

So, in Indian situation inclusion means full inclusion of children with disability in all the aspects of schooling that a child with no disability can access and enjoy.

EVOLUTION OF SCHOOL SETTINGS

SEGREGATED SCHOOL SETTING

Segregated system in education means students with disability learn separately from other children in a normal school or they complete their education in a special school. In segregated education system, students from different groups are taught separately in settings away from their friends. There are different aspects that identify the segregation in education such as racial aspect especially followed in western countries where separate schools for black and white children, separate school system for ethnic classes, gender-based schools wherein especially girls are taught in segregated class rooms or schools and children with disability are not permitted to take admission in a regular school (Carla Sheld, 2015). The segregated school system creates an emotional, cultural and learning gap between children with disability and the others. As segregated education takes place in an environment where children with disability are treated separately in all its sense from their non-disabled peer-group. Segregated education is framed on a philosophical principle that special children cannot be educated along with children without disability.

According to National Curriculum Framework for School Education (NCFSE), 'Segregation or isolation is good neither for learners with disabilities nor for general learners without disabilities. Societal requirement is that learners with special needs should be educated along with other learners in inclusive schools which are cost effective and have sound pedagogical practices (NCERT, 2000).

A segregated school system invites children with disability and engages them separately based on a curriculum that will meet their purpose, special methods of teaching, testing etc. that will suit their requirements. In a segregated education system, philosophy behind which is that children with disability are misfit in the regular education system, assuming that they are incapable to learn through regular pedagogy. In India the Christian missionaries took initiatives to open special school for disable child as a part of their charitable activities. The first segregated school for deaf and mute was started in the year 1883 at Bombay and that for blind

in the year 1887 by Anne Sharp in Amritsar. The first school for mentally challenged was established in 1918 at Kurseong (Mishra, 2000). The famous educationist Kauffman (1993) believed that a segregated school system is not good for the overall growth of a disabled child. This type of separation in schools creates segregation in all spheres of life in the future of each child with disability.

MOVING FROM SEGREGATED TO INTEGRATED SCHOOL SETTING

Integrated education mainly focused on the placement of children with disability in the mainstream school settings. This system was emerging from the Medical Model of Disability. It is more or less similar to inclusive education but this system does not guarantee the equal opportunity for the CWSN. Integration is a process through which learners with disability are confined to a special class/ unit within the regular school (Sharma & Doppler, 2005). In the mid of 1950s the concept of integrated education system emerged in our country. Students with disability and the other students without disability are taught in a classroom with suitable resources and adaptations.

The formal system of education of children with disability was started in India in the year 1869. Jane Leu pot started a school for the 'blind students' in Banaras (Miles, 1997). The financial support for this school was given by church missionary society. In 1918 the first formal school for children with physical and intellectual disability was started in Kurseong, which is in the eastern part of India. Even in the post-independence period the segregated system of education was followed by different non-governmental organizations across the country. according to Aggarwal (1994, there were 70 schools for hearing impaired, 115 schools for children with visual impairment, 25 schools for orthopedic disable and 27 schools for intellectually disable children

The Integrated Education for Disabled Children (IEDC) a centrally sponsored program was announced for integrating the mentally and physically challenged students in the society in (1974) The IEDC program was implemented in the different states and union territories in our country to promote the access and retention of children with mild to moderate disability in the regular school environment. All state Governments bear fifty percentage of the financial cost for the successful implementation of these centrally sponsored programs in the regular schools. According to Mani (1988), only 1881 students from 81 schools of all over the country were benefited from this IEDC program. The main problem faced during the implementation of IEDC programme was the lack of trained and experienced teachers, lack of awareness among the teaching and non-teaching staff about the educational needs of the disable children, the lack

of infrastructure facilities especially in village schools suitable for promoting education of CWSN. The IEDC programme was revised in the year 1992 in which 100% financial assistance was given to the CWSN to integrate them to the normal school setting (Bhattacharya, 2010). Under the revised programme, the students were given financial support for purchasing books and school uniform, were provided with instructional materials, free transportation facility, assistive equipment's, amplifying equipment's, reading facility for the visually handicapped, special teachers, hostel facility and removal of architectural hindrances in the school campus (Mondal & Mete, 2012). Under this revised IEDC scheme, Kerala state attained a remarkable success in achieving its goals. The main emphasis of this scheme included special training for various life skills to all type of CWSN, counselling facilities and pre-school training programmes for parents. Even though the programme met with limited success, it was successful in spreading awareness of integrating children with disability in mainstream education.

Project Integrated Education for the Disabled (PIED) came in to force in the year 1987. The programme was implemented due to the combined interventions of the Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD) in association with the Nation Council of Education Research and Training (NCERT) and UNICEF. The main focus of this program was to strengthen the IEDC plan (NCERT, 1987). A composite area approach was followed in the place of a school-based approach. This was a major shift in the strategy and it was largely influenced in the overall achievement of the goals of this program. In the 'Composite Area Approach', a block of population was considered as the area for the project instead of confining the program to a particular school or institution. In the project area all schools ensured the enrollment of CWSN. These schools shared its resources such as instructional materials, specialized equipment and trained teachers in the area of special education. The different states in county such as Tamil Nadu, Orissa, Rajasthan, Nagaland, Haryana, Mizoram, Madhya Pradesh, Delhi Municipal Corporation, Baroda Municipal Corporation and Maharashtra implemented this project. The PIED gave stress to achieve the goal of Universalization of Elementary Education (UEE) among children with disability. After the implementation of PIED, there was a significant increase in the enrollment and retention not only among the population of mildly CWSN but also among severely disabled. Three-level teachers training approach was followed under the PIED programme in each selected block as presented below:

- An orientation course for five days is applicable for all teachers in the regular school.
- An intensive training course for 10% of teachers for a period of six-weeks.

- A multi-category training course for a period of one year is applicable to 8 to 10 permanent school teachers in a regular school. Those who successfully completed this multi-category course were required to act as a resource teacher.

In 1996, the Government of India implemented the Person with Disabilities (Equal Opportunity Protection of Right and Full Participation) Act, PWD Act of 1995 (by Ministry of Law and Company Affairs 1996). This Act covered different categories of disability such as low vision, blindness, hearing impairment, Leprosy cured, Locomotor Disability, mental illness and mental retardation. The promotional as well as the preventive aspect of rehabilitation was covered under this Act. The aspects such as education, employment, social security, non-discrimination, prevention and early detention, human power development, research and alternative actions were covered under this Act. The Person with Disability Act attempted to ensure free and compulsory education for all disable children under the age of 18. The free and compulsory education ensured the free supply of books, stationery, study materials, removal of infrastructural hindrances, adaptive curriculum, scholarship and modified examination and evaluation system that met the requirements of children with disability.

INCLUSIVE SCHOOL SYSTEM

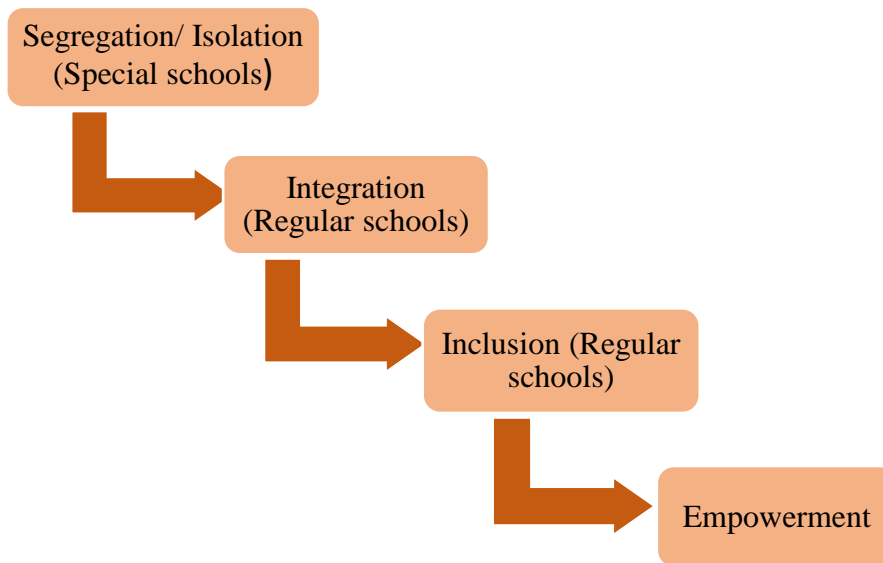
Inclusive education is an approach in educating and placing children with disability in regular schools with the children of the same age group who do not have disability. This is the most acceptable model of education which tries to restructure the school environment where all children can learn in a single classroom. According to Alberta (2007) “inclusive education is a way of thinking and acting that demonstrates universal acceptance of and belonging for all students. It is a value-based approach to accepting responsibility of all students. It also means that all students will have equitable opportunity to be included in the typical learning environment and programme of choice. The creation of a truly inclusive education system in the province requires a shared responsibility of all educational stake holders”. In an Inclusive education model, the school welcomes all types of children regardless of their physical, social, intellectual, emotional, linguistic or other conditions. The type of students includes disabled, gifted children, street and working children, children from remote locations, children from nomadic groups, children from linguistic, ethnic, cultural minorities groups and children from other disadvantaged or marginal groups (UNESCO) (2017) Inclusive school tries to remove all the hindrances in education of all learners and accepts each student as a resource of an institution (Booth, Tony & Ainscow, Mel, 2002). Inclusive education model promotes inclusiveness of each child in education. So, in inclusive schools, all students are appreciated

without any discrepancies. In an inclusive school, all children are educated and treated as equal and provided equal opportunity to participate in curricular as well as co-curricular activities; teachers modify their teaching methodologies and curriculum so that all students are equally benefited in this system.

The broader goal of inclusive education is in creating an inclusive society. The main focus of this model is to achieve access, participation and achievement of all students in education and it concentrates on providing quality education which is relevant to individual learners. Young people and children must participate in their learning and be able to concentrate in achieving their individual goals Inclusive education is based on the principle that all children can learn and belong to the mainstream of general education and community life.

According to Bryan Harman, (2008) “Successful models of inclusion believe that All children are different, and All children can learn. There is nothing about a child that needs to be ‘fixed’ in order for that child to fit in to a system. The school system, as a whole, is enabled to change in order to meet the individual needs of All learners. School personnel will emphasize how the classroom/school will be changed to support the success of a child and the overall concern will be about how the extra adaptations and services will benefit everyone. Celebrating diversity, helping everyone and having s support worker for the class are key factors to effective inclusive education. Remember schools need to learn as well as teach. Once schools realize that inclusion will increase the academic performance and well-being of All students, they will be more than willing to work towards making inclusion a reality”.

Inclusive education is a system which is not about dumping children with special needs in the regular school/classroom, rather engagement in classroom transactions according to the needs and understanding of each and every child. The inclusive schools truly reduce school drop-out rates among children with disability and they have higher level of school achievement as compared to a segregated classroom environment.



Historical path of Inclusion

According to UNESCO (1994), “All children learn together whatever possible regardless of any difficulties or difference they may have. Inclusive schools must recognize and respond to the diverse needs of their students, accommodating both different styles and rate of learning and ensuring quality education to all through appropriate curricula, organizational arrangements, teaching strategies, resource use and partnership with their communities. Inclusive education promotes child’s learning and participation of parents and community in planning and execution of services for children in general and CWSN in particular”.

CONCLUSION

Inclusive education is a modern approach to education which considers diversity as an integral part of the teaching learning process. Its main aim is the marginalization of individual and promotion of differences. The journey from exclusion to inclusion in the era of inclusive education in India which reflects a momentous transformation in the countries educational philosophy, aims of education, policy and social realization. In India the journey of education of children with disabilities start from social exclusion, segregation, integration and leads to achieve the goals of complete inclusion where differences were celebrated and each students got equal opportunities to grow and the goals of a true inclusive school education is achieved when every child is welcomed without any discrimination.

References

- Ainscow, M. (1999). *Understanding the development of inclusive schools*. London: Falmer Press.
- Ainscow, M. (2007). *Developing Inclusive Education Systems: The Role of Organizational Cultures and Leadership*. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 11(3), 235-248.
- Ainscow, M., & Sandill, A. (2010). *Developing inclusive education systems: The role of organizational cultures and leadership*. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 14(4), 401-416.
- Ainscow, M., Booth, T., & Dyson, A. (2006). *Understanding and developing inclusive practices in schools: A collaborative action research network*. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 10(3), 277-288.
- Ainscow, M., Booth, T., & Dyson, A. (2006). *Understanding and developing inclusive practices in schools: A collaborative action research network*. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 10(3), 277-292.
- Ananti, M. N., & A. A. (2012). *Current practices shaping inclusive education in UAE schools: A teachers' perspective*.
- Artiles, A. J., & Bal, A. (2008). *Who are we to critique? Deconstructing K-16 "inclusive" language and practices*. *Learning Disability Quarterly*, 31(1), 19-31.
- Artiles, A. J., & Dyson, A. S. (2005). *Inclusive education and urban restructuring: What does it take to leave no child behind?* *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 9(4), 339-351.
- Avramidis, E., Bayliss, P., & Burden, R. (2000). *A survey into mainstream teachers' attitudes towards the inclusion of children with special educational needs in the ordinary school in one local education authority*. *Educational Psychology*, 20(2), 191-211.
- Shiju, R. (2019). *Inclusive Education in Kerala: A Policy Analysis*. *Journal of Inclusive Education*, 5(2), 45-56.
- Slee, R. (2011). *The Irregular School: Exclusion, Schooling, and Inclusive Education*. Routledge.
- Slee, R. (2018). *Mainstreaming Disability Studies? Theory, Policy and Practice*. *Disability & Society*, 33(6), 1025-1041.
- Slee, R., & Allan, J. (2001). *Excluding the included: A reconsideration of inclusive education*. *International Studies in Sociology of Education*, 11(2), 173-191.
- Slee, R., & Allan, J. (2001). *Excluding the included: A reconsideration of inclusive education*. *International Studies in Sociology of Education*, 11(2), 173-191.
- Smith, C., Dowson, N., & Peryer, G. (2006). *The Index for Inclusion as a guide to developing the culture of schools*. *School Leadership & Management*, 26(4), 359-370.
- Soman, K. P., & Rajan, A. (2015). *Challenges in Implementing Inclusive Education in Kerala: Insights from School Principals*. *Educational Psychology*, 35(6), 789-804.
- Sreedharan, M., & Menon, S. (2010). *Inclusive Education and Students with Disabilities: A Study of Kerala Schools*. *International Journal of Disability, Development, and Education*, 57(4), 411-426.
- Tashie, C., Shapiro-Barnard, S., Dillon, A., Schuh, M., Jorgensen, C., & Nisbet, J. (1993) *Changes in latitude, changes in attitude: the role of the inclusion facilitator*. Durham, USA: University of New Hampshire Institute on Disability.
- Taylor, G. (1997) *Community building in schools: Developing a circle of friends*. *Educational and Child Psychology*, 14(3), 45-50.