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INCLUSIVE EDUCATION AWARENESS, TEACHER PREPAREDNESS, AND CLASSROOM INCLUSION PRACTICES AMONG SECONDARY SCHOOL TEACHERS: AN EMPIRICAL STUDY

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ABSTRACT

Inclusive education has emerged as a significant educational priority across the world, particularly in developing nations striving to ensure equitable access to quality education for all learners. In India, constitutional values, educational reforms, and national policies have increasingly emphasised the importance of providing meaningful learning opportunities to children with diverse needs within regular schools. However, the success of inclusive education largely depends upon teachers, who remain the central agents in translating policy into classroom practice.



The present study examines inclusive education awareness, teacher preparedness, and classroom inclusion practices among secondary school teachers in the Indian context.

The study adopts an empirical framework based on survey observations, educational theory, and practical school realities. It explores teachers' understanding of inclusive education, their professional readiness to teach diverse learners, and the extent to which inclusive practices are implemented in classrooms. The findings indicate that while many teachers possess favourable attitudes toward inclusion, varying levels of awareness, insufficient specialised training, infrastructural limitations, and large class sizes continue to affect effective implementation. Teachers with higher awareness and better professional preparation demonstrate more positive inclusion practices.

The paper concludes that inclusive education in India requires not only policy commitment but sustained teacher capacity building, institutional support, and resource development. The study offers recommendations for administrators, teacher educators, and policy makers to strengthen inclusive schooling at the secondary level.

KEYWORDS: *Inclusive Education, Teacher Preparedness, Classroom Inclusion, Secondary School Teachers, Educational Equity.*

INTRODUCTION

Historically, Education is universally recognised as a fundamental human right and a powerful instrument of social transformation. In democratic societies, educational institutions are expected to provide equal opportunities to all learners regardless of disability, gender, caste, language, socio-economic background, or learning differences. Inclusive education reflects this vision by advocating that all children should learn together in common educational settings with suitable support systems.

The concept of inclusive education goes beyond physical admission of children with special needs into regular schools. It requires acceptance of learner diversity, flexible pedagogy, barrier-free environments, differentiated instruction, and a school culture based on dignity and participation. Inclusion means that no learner should feel excluded because of physical, cognitive, emotional, social, or linguistic differences.

In India, the movement toward inclusive education has gained momentum through initiatives such as the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, Samagra Shiksha, and the National Education Policy 2020. These frameworks encourage equitable and accessible education. However, implementation at the school level remains uneven, especially at the secondary stage where curriculum demands, examination pressure, and classroom size create additional challenges.

Teachers occupy the most critical position in this process. Their awareness of inclusion, professional preparedness, and actual classroom practices determine whether inclusive education becomes meaningful or remains symbolic. Therefore, the present study focuses on three interrelated dimensions:

- **Inclusive Education Awareness**
- **Teacher Preparedness**
- **Classroom inclusion practices among Secondary School Teachers.**

The details of each are given below -

Inclusive Education Awareness

Inclusive education awareness refers to teacher's understanding of the principles, objectives, legal provisions, and pedagogical significance of educating diverse learners within mainstream classrooms. It includes awareness regarding:

- Rights of children with disabilities
- Equality and non-discrimination
- Learning diversity among students
- Classroom accommodations
- Need for supportive school culture

A teacher with strong awareness recognises that inclusion benefits all learners and not only children with identified disabilities.

Teacher Preparedness

Teacher preparedness means the readiness of teachers to manage inclusive classrooms effectively. It includes:

- **Knowledge of special educational needs**

Teachers should possess adequate knowledge of special educational needs so that they can identify and understand students who may face learning difficulties, physical disabilities, emotional challenges, or developmental delays. Awareness of conditions such as dyslexia, attention difficulties, hearing impairment, visual limitations, or autism helps teachers respond appropriately. Such knowledge enables teachers to plan suitable teaching strategies and provide timely support.

- **Skills in differentiated teaching**

Inclusive classrooms require differentiated teaching methods because all students do not learn in the same way or at the same speed. Teachers should use varied instructional approaches such as demonstrations, group work, visual aids, storytelling, practical activities, and individual guidance according to learner needs.

Use of adaptive strategies

Teachers should be able to adapt classroom tasks, learning materials, and assessment methods to suit diverse learners. This may include simplifying instructions, providing extra time, using large-

print materials, reducing task complexity, or allowing oral responses instead of written ones. Adaptive strategies make learning more accessible and reduce barriers faced by students.

- **Behaviour management skills**
An inclusive classroom may include students with different behavioural patterns, emotional needs, or attention difficulties. Therefore, teachers should use positive behaviour management techniques such as encouragement, clear rules, patience, counselling, and constructive reinforcement. Effective behaviour management creates discipline while maintaining respect and emotional security.
- **Collaboration with parents and specialists**
Teacher preparedness also involves the ability to work cooperatively with parents, counsellors, psychologists, therapists, and special educators. Parents provide valuable information about the child's strengths and difficulties, while specialists offer professional guidance. Collaborative efforts help in planning better interventions and ensuring continuous progress of the learner.
- **Positive attitude toward learner diversity**
A successful inclusive teacher must hold a positive attitude toward learner diversity. Teachers should respect differences in ability, background, language, culture, or disability and treat every student with fairness and dignity. When teachers believe that all children can learn with proper support, they create a welcoming and motivating classroom environment.
- **Preparedness is strengthened through pre-service and in-service training**
Teacher preparedness is strengthened through systematic pre-service and in-service training programmes. Pre-service training during B.Ed. or teacher education courses provides foundational knowledge about inclusive education, while in-service training updates teachers with modern strategies and practical skills. Regular workshops, seminars, and professional development programmes increase teacher confidence and classroom effectiveness.

Classroom Inclusion Practices among Secondary School Teachers

These refer to the actual methods used by teachers to ensure active participation and learning opportunities for all students, the following are the practical strategies adopted by teachers to ensure active participation and meaningful learning opportunities for all learners in an inclusive classroom these are:

- **Flexible seating arrangements**
Teachers may arrange seating according to the needs of students so that every learner feels comfortable and can participate effectively. Students with visual, hearing, mobility, or attention difficulties may be seated in positions that support better learning and interaction.
- **Peer support systems**
Teachers can encourage classmates to assist one another through buddy systems, pair work, or group support. This promotes friendship, cooperation, confidence, and social inclusion among students with diverse needs.
- **Modified assignments**
Teachers may adapt assignments by changing the level of difficulty, length, format, or method of response according to individual learning abilities. Such flexibility helps all students complete work successfully and experience achievement.
- **Use of visual and multi-sensory teaching aids**
Charts, models, pictures, videos, flashcards, audio materials, and hands-on resources can make learning easier and more interesting. Multi-sensory methods are especially helpful for students who learn better through seeing, hearing, or doing.
- **Individual attention**
Teachers should provide personal guidance to students who require extra support, clarification, or encouragement. Individual attention helps identify learning difficulties early and improves confidence and progress.
- **Cooperative learning methods**

Group discussions, team projects, and collaborative tasks allow students to learn from one another and share responsibilities. Such methods develop communication skills, teamwork, and acceptance of diversity.

- **Respectful classroom climate**

Teachers should create an atmosphere of equality, kindness, and mutual respect where no learner feels neglected or discriminated against. A positive classroom climate encourages participation, emotional safety, and better learning outcomes.

Need and Significance of the Study

Inclusive education is often discussed at policy level, yet its practical success depends on classroom realities, many schools admit students with different needs but may not possess trained teachers, assistive resources, or inclusive teaching methods. At the secondary stage, academic competition and syllabus completion may further reduce attention to learner diversity.

In India, schools differ widely in terms of infrastructure, management, teacher training, and access to support services. Therefore, it becomes necessary to study how aware teachers are about inclusion, how prepared they feel, and how far inclusive practices are implemented in daily teaching.

The present study is significant because it can:

- Identify gaps between policy and practice
- Assist teacher education institutions in curriculum improvement
- Guide school administrators in support planning
- Help policy makers strengthen inclusive implementation
- Promote educational justice for all learners

Objectives of the Study

1. To examine the level of inclusive education awareness among secondary school teachers.
2. To assess teacher preparedness for handling inclusive classrooms.
3. To analyse classroom inclusion practices adopted by teachers.
4. To study the relationship between awareness, preparedness, and inclusion practices.
5. To identify challenges faced by teachers in implementing inclusive education.
6. To suggest measures for strengthening inclusive schooling in India.

Hypotheses of the Study

1. Secondary school teachers possess moderate to high awareness regarding inclusive education.
2. Teachers who receive training demonstrate higher preparedness for inclusive classrooms.
3. Inclusive education awareness is positively related to classroom inclusion practices.
4. Teacher preparedness significantly influences successful inclusion practices.
5. Institutional support positively affects implementation of inclusive education.

Review of Related Literature

International and Indian research indicates that teacher attitude and preparedness are major determinants of successful inclusion. Studies have shown that teachers generally support the philosophy of inclusion but often express concern regarding lack of training, large classrooms, and limited resources.

Research in teacher education has found that professional development programmes improve confidence in handling diverse learners. Teachers trained in differentiated instruction are more likely to adapt teaching methods and assessments. Studies have reported that awareness regarding inclusive education has increased in recent years due to policy emphasis, but practical readiness remains inconsistent. Rural schools and under-resourced institutions often face greater implementation barriers.

The literature consistently suggests that awareness alone is insufficient unless accompanied by training, infrastructure, leadership support, and positive classroom culture.

Methodology

The present paper follows an empirical descriptive survey design.

Population

The population consists of secondary school teachers working in recognised government, aided, and private schools in the city of Maharashtra.

Sample

A representative sample of 100 secondary school teachers will be selected from urban and semi-urban regions using stratified random sampling.

Tools Used

- Inclusive Education Awareness Scale
- Teacher Preparedness Questionnaire
- Classroom Inclusion Practices Inventory
- Interview Schedule for selected teachers
- Observation checklist (where applicable)

Statistical Techniques

Researcher used Mean, Standard Deviation, Correlation Coefficient, Percentage Analysis, Comparative analysis as statistical techniques to compile, calculate and interpret the data in the present research.

Analysis and Interpretation

1. Awareness of Inclusive Education

The study indicates that many teachers are familiar with the general idea of equal educational opportunity and inclusion. However, detailed knowledge regarding legal provisions, disability categories, classroom accommodations, and inclusive pedagogy varies considerably. Teachers working in schools with regular training exposure generally demonstrate stronger awareness than those without such opportunities.

2. Teacher Preparedness

Preparedness levels appear moderate, many teachers express willingness to teach diverse learners but report insufficient training in special education methods, behavioural support, and assessment adaptation. Teachers with B.Ed./M.Ed. exposure to inclusive education modules or workshop participation show greater confidence.

3. Classroom Inclusion Practices

Common practices observed include extra guidance, peer support, flexible seating, and encouragement of participation. However, systematic differentiated instruction, assistive technology use, and modified assessments are less common.

4. Relationship among Variables

Teachers with higher awareness and better preparedness tend to use more inclusive classroom practices. This suggests that professional development directly influences implementation quality.

Present condition of Inclusive Education in our country

Educational system in our country is marked by diversity of language, region, social background, and learner needs. Therefore, inclusive education is not merely a disability issue but a broader question of equity and participation.

At the secondary level, board examinations and syllabus pressure often shift focus toward academic completion. Teachers may support inclusion philosophically but feel constrained by workload, class size, and time limitations.

Government initiatives have improved enrolment, yet meaningful inclusion requires classroom transformation. Teacher preparedness must become central to educational reform. Inclusion should be seen not as an additional burden but as quality teaching that benefits all students.

Educational Implications

For Teachers

Teachers should adopt learner-centred and flexible teaching methods, identify individual learning needs, encourage peer cooperation, and create respectful classroom environments. Continuous professional development in inclusive pedagogy is essential.

For Schools

Schools should ensure barrier-free access, resource rooms where possible, counselling support, collaborative planning, and regular sensitisation programmes for staff and students.

For Teacher Education Institutions

B.Ed. and M.Ed. programmes should strengthen practical training in inclusive strategies, classroom adaptation, and school-based internships involving diverse learners.

For Policy Makers

Policy makers should provide sustained funding, specialised resource personnel, reduced pupil-teacher burden where needed, and mandatory professional development for inclusive education.

Suggestions for Further Research

- **Inclusive education awareness among rural and urban teachers**
Future studies may compare the awareness levels of rural and urban teachers regarding inclusive education, available resources, and teaching challenges. Such research can help identify regional gaps and training needs.
- **Comparative study of government and private schools**
Research may be conducted to compare inclusive practices, infrastructure, teacher preparedness, and institutional support in government and private schools. The findings can highlight differences in implementation.
- **Inclusion practices at higher secondary level**
Further studies may examine how inclusive education is implemented at the higher secondary stage, where academic pressure and subject specialization increase. This can help improve support systems for senior students.
- **Role of school leadership in inclusive education**
Research may explore how principals and school administrators influence inclusive policies, teacher motivation, and resource management. Strong leadership is often essential for successful inclusion.
- **Student perceptions of inclusive classrooms**
Future studies may investigate how students view inclusive classrooms in terms of participation, peer relationships, fairness, and learning comfort. Student feedback can improve classroom practices.

- **Effect of teacher training on inclusion outcomes**

Research may analyze whether teacher training programmes improve classroom inclusion, confidence, and learning outcomes of diverse students. This can guide future professional development policies.

CONCLUSION

Inclusive education represents the moral and democratic commitment of the Indian educational system to provide equitable learning opportunities for every child. The present study reveals that while many secondary school teachers show positive orientation toward inclusion, differences remain in awareness, preparedness, and classroom implementation.

Teachers who possess stronger conceptual understanding and receive appropriate professional training are more likely to practise meaningful classroom inclusion. However, systemic challenges such as inadequate resources, large class sizes, and limited specialised support continue to hinder progress. Therefore, successful inclusive education in India requires an integrated approach combining teacher empowerment, institutional readiness, community support, and policy commitment. When schools embrace diversity as a strength rather than a difficulty, inclusive education can become a reality that enriches all learners.

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