



INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF CREATIVE RESEARCH THOUGHTS (IJCRT)

An International Open Access, Peer-reviewed, Refereed Journal

Challenges Faced By Students With Intellectual Disabilities In Inclusive Classroom: Critical Analysis

Seema Yadav¹, Rajesh Kumar Yadav²

¹Asst.Prof. Spl.Edu (ID), Composite Regional Center, Lucknow

²RO Composite Regional Center, Gorakhpur

Abstract

Inclusive education promotes equal learning opportunities for all students including those with Intellectual Disability. However implementing inclusive practices often presents significant challenges. This paper explore the academic , social , emotional, and structural barriers faced by students with Intellectual Disability in inclusive classroom and provides recommendation for improving inclusion practices. Inclusive education aims to integrate students with intellectual disabilities (Intellectual Disability) into mainstream classrooms, providing equitable learning opportunities. However, its implementation faces multifaceted challenges that hinder effective inclusion. Academically, these students often struggle with rigid curricula not tailored to their learning needs, compounded by insufficient teacher training and lack of specialized instructional strategies. Socially, students with Intellectual Disability confront peer rejection, bullying, and isolation, impacting their social development and emotional well-being. Structural barriers such as inadequate facilities, limited access to assistive technologies, and insufficient institutional support further exacerbate their educational experience. Additionally, negative attitudes and misconceptions among educators and peers create attitudinal obstacles to inclusion. Overcoming these challenges requires a comprehensive approach including professional development for teachers, curriculum flexibility, enhanced support services, and community awareness to foster acceptance and ensure meaningful participation of students with intellectual disabilities in inclusive settings.

Keywords: Inclusive education, Intellectual disability, Teacher training, Social-emotional adjustment, Educational barriers etc.

1. Introduction

Inclusive education has become a global educational priority, emphasizing the integration of students with disabilities, including those with intellectual disabilities, into mainstream classrooms. Rooted in the belief that “children who learn together, learn to live together,” it envisions schools as inclusive communities where diversity is respected and nurtured. The goal extends beyond academic learning—it encompasses social inclusion, emotional development, and the cultivation of empathy among all learners. Despite its noble intentions, the implementation of inclusive education often encounters profound challenges. Students with intellectual disabilities face barriers that stem not only from the curriculum and classroom environment but also from societal attitudes and systemic shortcomings. These barriers undermine the core principles of equality and participation that inclusion seeks to uphold, making it essential to critically examine the factors that hinder effective practice.

Attitudinal and structural barriers represent some of the most persistent challenges in realizing inclusive education. Many teachers and parents continue to hold preconceived notions that students with intellectual disabilities cannot thrive in mainstream classrooms, leading to reluctance in implementing inclusive strategies. This lack of confidence is often rooted in inadequate teacher preparation and limited exposure to inclusive pedagogies during professional training. Moreover, infrastructural constraints such as overcrowded classrooms, insufficient assistive technologies, and the absence of resource rooms further impede inclusive efforts. Curricular rigidity poses an additional hurdle—standardized teaching and assessment frameworks seldom accommodate diverse cognitive abilities or learning styles. Consequently, students with intellectual disabilities may struggle to keep pace academically, resulting in disengagement, behavioural issues, and diminished self-esteem. These challenges underscore the need for educational systems to move beyond token inclusion and instead foster genuine participation through differentiated instruction, Universal Design for Learning (UDL), and individualized support.

Systemic and policy-level inadequacies further compound these classroom-level challenges. While many countries have adopted inclusive education policies in alignment with global frameworks such as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG 4), implementation often remains superficial. Schools frequently lack adequate funding, clear operational guidelines, and sustained professional development programs for teachers. Collaborative partnerships among educators, parents, and specialists are weak or inconsistent, resulting in fragmented support for students with intellectual disabilities. To transform inclusion from policy to practice, educational systems must prioritize continuous teacher training, curriculum flexibility, and accessible infrastructure. Equally crucial is fostering community awareness to dismantle stigmas surrounding disability. A holistic, well-resourced, and empathetic approach is essential to ensure that inclusive education evolves from an aspirational vision into an empowering, lived reality for all learners.

Understanding Intellectual Disabilities

Intellectual disabilities are characterized by limitation in intellectual functioning and adaptive behaviors. These limitations affect learning, reasoning, problem solving, and social skills, often requiring individualized instruction and support.

2. Challenges in Inclusive Classroom

2.1 Academic challenges

Curriculum Inappropriate: Standard curricula often lack the flexibility to accommodate diverse learning needs. Standard curricula are often rigid and not designed to meet the diverse and unique learning needs of students with Intellectual Disability. These students require curricula that are flexible, level-appropriate (matched to their developmental and functional levels), and focused on practical life skills as well as academics. An appropriate curriculum for students with Intellectual Disability should emphasize functionality, social competencies, and daily living skills in addition to academic content. It should also be creative, integrated, and adaptive to individual needs. Curriculum flexibility means adapting the content, delivery methods, and timeframes to ensure accessibility and relevance for students with Intellectual Disability. Systems like Universal Design for Learning (UDL) promote curriculum design that anticipates diverse learning styles and reduces the need for later adaptation. Indian education boards (CBSE, NIOS) provide some accommodations like optional subjects, use of scribes, extra time, and open-choice schools to address these needs. The curriculum should reflect personal, social, occupational, and recreational domains that foster independent living and inclusion.

Pace of Instruction: Students with Intellectual Disability may struggle to keep pace with the rest of the class. Students with Intellectual Disability often cannot keep up with the pace of instruction designed for typically developing peers. A slower or individualized pace is essential. Teachers need to allow flexibility in time and repeated practice, scaffold learning, and provide multi-sensory and activity-based methods aligned to the child's readiness and abilities to support their learning progression. Inclusive classrooms benefit from differentiated instruction and peer tutoring to accommodate varied learning speeds.

Assessment Methods: Traditional testing does not reflect their true abilities or progress. Traditional assessment methods are often unsuitable for students with Intellectual Disability because they focus on standardized written or oral tests that may not capture the student's actual functional skills or progress. Alternative assessments such as formative assessments, portfolio reviews, performance-based tasks, and observational records better reflect the growth and real abilities of the student. Assessments should be aligned with Individualized Education Programs (IEP) and functional goals set for the student. Flexibility and multiple modes of expression in assessments help students demonstrate learning in ways best suited to their strengths.

2.2 Social challenges

Peer acceptance: Students **with** Intellectual Disability may experience isolation or bullying. Students with Intellectual Disability often face isolation or bullying from their peers because of their differences in behaviour, communication, and learning abilities. They may be socially excluded or stigmatized, which can lead to loneliness, low self-esteem, and anxiety. Lack of understanding and awareness among typically developing peers contributes to these social barriers. Children with Intellectual Disability may also exhibit behaviours that peers find confusing or may be less able to respond to social cues, increasing the risk of rejection or teasing.

Communication Barriers: Difficulty expressing themselves or understanding others impedes social interaction. Many students with Intellectual Disability experience difficulty expressing themselves clearly or understanding others, which makes social interaction challenging. They may struggle with language comprehension, reading social cues like facial expressions or tone of voice, and responding appropriately in conversations. Such communication barriers limit their ability to engage meaningfully with classmates and adults.

Limited friendships: Forming lasting relationship with peer without disabilities is often difficult. Forming and maintaining lasting friendships with peers without disabilities is often difficult for students with Intellectual Disability. Their friendships may lack warmth, closeness, and reciprocity compared to those of typically developing peers. The social skill deficits and communication difficulties hinder their ability to establish deep social connections. They may also have smaller social networks and fewer opportunities to interact in social settings, leading to limited friendships and social isolation.

2.3 Teacher related challenges

Lack of training: Many teachers feel unprepared to handle students with Intellectual Disability effectively. Many teachers feel unprepared or lack specific training to effectively handle students with Intellectual Disability. Traditional teacher education programs often do not provide in-depth knowledge or practical skills related to intellectual disabilities.

Negative attitudes: Some educators may hold low expectation or harbor implicit biases. Negative attitudes may manifest as lowered academic demands, lack of encouragement, or exclusion from meaningful participation in classroom activities.

Increased workload: Adapting lessons and managing diverse needs can be demanding. Promoting awareness, sensitization, and positive attitudes through professional development is essential to foster inclusive educational environments. Adapting lessons to suit diverse learning needs, managing behavioural issues, and providing individualized attention can be demanding and increase the teacher's workload. Teachers must modify curriculum, prepare specialized teaching materials, document progress, and often collaborate with therapists, parents, and support staff. This increased responsibility can lead to stress and burnout without adequate resources, support, and institutional recognition. Many

educational settings lack adequate support services such as specialized teaching staff, therapists (speech, occupational, behavioural), and availability of special education resources. Without these supports, students with Intellectual Disability do not receive the individualized instruction, therapy, and assistance they need for meaningful participation and learning. Resource rooms, assistive technologies, and collaboration with multidisciplinary teams remain limited in many schools, especially in rural and under-resourced areas.

2.4 Environmental and institutional Barriers

Insufficient Support Services: Lack of teaching assignments therapist or special education resources. Many educational settings lack adequate support services such as specialized teaching staff, therapists (speech, occupational, behavioural), and availability of special education resources. Without these supports, students with Intellectual Disability do not receive the individualized instruction, therapy, and assistance they need for meaningful participation and learning. Resource rooms, assistive technologies, and collaboration with multidisciplinary teams remain limited in many schools, especially in rural and under-resourced areas.

Infrastructure: Classroom may not be designed to support diverse learners. Classrooms and school buildings often do not have accessible and supportive physical infrastructure. Common deficits include lack of ramps, accessible toilets, tactile or sensory-friendly spaces, and adaptive furniture that supports diverse learners. These infrastructural gaps hinder mobility, safety, and comfort for students with disabilities, reducing their inclusion and participation in mainstream education activities.

Policy Gaps: Lack of clear guideline for inclusive practice hampers implementation. Even though policies like the Right to Education Act, National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, and the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (RPWD) Act 2016 affirm support for inclusive education, clear guidelines and effective implementation frameworks are often missing or insufficient. Policy implementation is slowed by fragmented coordination among government departments, inadequate funding utilization, and lack of accountability mechanisms. Monitoring tools and school-level inclusion indicators are weak, making it hard to assess progress or enforce inclusive practices systematically. Many schools interpret inclusion as mere physical presence rather than holistic curriculum adaptation and support services.

Professional Development: Continuous training and professional development enable teachers to learn inclusive pedagogies, curriculum adaptations, behaviour management, and individualizing instruction. Regular workshops and refresher courses help update teachers on latest research, technologies, and best practices, boosting teacher confidence and effectiveness.

Individualized Education Plan (IEP): An IEP involves tailored instruction and specific measurable goals based on the student's strengths, needs, and developmental level. It guides teachers in providing differentiated learning experiences, accommodations, and ongoing progress monitoring. IEPs foster collaboration among teachers, therapists, parents, and students for holistic growth.

Peer Support Programs: Peer support programs promote empathy, social inclusion, and collaboration among students with and without disabilities. Approaches include peer-mediated interventions where trained peers model and reinforce positive social behaviours, peer buddies, and cooperative learning groups. These programs improve social skills, reduce isolation, and create a supportive learning community. Peer supporters receive training on communication strategies, disability awareness, and friendship skills.

Collaborative Teaching Models: Involving special educators, therapists, and general teachers in co-planning and co-teaching offers multifaceted support to students with Intellectual Disability. Collaborative models include team teaching, resource room support, and consultation to effectively address diverse learner needs. This approach maximizes expertise and ensures consistency in instruction and behaviour support.

3. Strategies for Improvement

- **Professional Development:**

Continuous training for teachers on inclusive pedagogies.

- **Individualized education Plan:** tailored instruction and goals.

- **Peer support Programs:** Promotes empathy and collaboration among students.

- **Collaborative Teaching Models:**

Involving special educators in planning and instruction.

Policy Reforms: Establish clear inclusion standards and allocate funding resources. Clear inclusion standards and guidelines must be established to ensure systematic implementation of inclusive education. Adequate funding allocation is essential to procure resources, infrastructure, support services, and teacher training. Policies need monitoring mechanisms, accountability, and advocacy to bridge the gap between vision and practice. Legislative reforms should promote equity, accessibility, and meaningful participation of students with disabilities. Together, these strategies build an inclusive educational ecosystem where students with intellectual disabilities receive equitable learning opportunities, social integration, and development support. If needed, expanded explanations and Hindi language versions for use in teacher training or administration can be provided. Strategies for improvement in educating students with intellectual disabilities include:

Conclusion:

Inclusive education remains a noble yet complex goal that demands a deep commitment to educational reform and social justice. Overcoming the challenges faced by students with intellectual disabilities requires systemic transformation, teacher empowerment, and inclusive policy implementation. Effective inclusion is not merely about physical placement in classrooms but about creating environments that value diversity, adapt to individual needs, and promote equal participation. By investing in teacher training, curriculum flexibility, and community awareness, education systems can ensure that inclusion becomes a sustainable reality. When implemented thoughtfully, inclusive education benefits all

learners—it nurtures empathy, respect, and collaboration while strengthening the social fabric of schools. Ultimately, true inclusion paves the way for a more equitable and compassionate society where every learner is valued and supported.

References

1. Alhomaïd, R., & Aldossary, T. (2024). General education teachers' perspectives on challenges to the inclusion of students with intellectual disabilities. *Education Sciences*, 15(7), 908.
2. Baker, E., & Pomerantz, H. (2024). Inclusive education, intellectual disabilities and the demise of full inclusion? *International Journal of Inclusive Education*.
3. Cornelius, D. J. K., & Balakrishnan, J. (2012). Inclusive education for students with intellectual disability [Paper]. Navajyothi Trust Institute of Mental Retardation.
4. Emerson, E., & Hatton, C. (2021). Children with intellectual disability and victimization: Prevalence, correlates, and outcomes. *Journal of Intellectual Disability Research*.
5. Florian, L., & Black-Hawkins, K. (2011). Exploring inclusive pedagogy.
6. Garg, A., & colleagues. (2023). Implementation and inclusion in India's National Education Policy (NEP): Implications for children with disabilities. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*.
7. Kaur, S., & Sharma, P. (2024). A systematic review on inclusive education research: Identifying concerns over children with disabilities (India, 2011–2020). *Asian Journal of Education and Social Studies*.
8. Kearney, A., et al. (2024). Effectiveness of interventions for improving educational outcomes of children with disabilities: A systematic review. *Campbell Systematic Reviews*. Wiley.
9. Lindsay, G. (2023). Teachers' attitudes towards inclusive education: A cross-national perspective. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*.
10. Ofori-Boateng, A., & colleagues. (2019). Peer victimization and school experiences of children with intellectual and developmental disabilities in Ghana. *Children and Youth Services Review*.
11. Smith, J., & Patel, R. (2022). A systematic review of inclusive education interventions in low- and lower-middle-income countries. *International Review of Education*.
12. UNESCO / NeMTSS. (2023). The evidence for inclusive education: Research brief. Nebraska MTSS.
13. The advantages and challenges of inclusive education. (2023). *Educational Review*. ERIC.