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The Advantages and Challenges of Inclusive Education: Striving for Equity in the Classroom


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Abstract

Inclusive education is the process of integrating individuals with disabilities into a regular classroom, and it helps reflect the world's commitment to equal educational opportunities as outlined in UNCRPD. It emphasizes the importance of embracing diversity and promoting acceptance among students who are impaired. This paper examines why it is important to include learners with impairments into mainstream classes and the favorable attitudes towards inclusive education among teachers, administrators and students. Many barriers hinder its implementation such as lack of professional development for teachers, insufficient facilities for learning, difficulty in creating relationships between classmates, inadequate parent participation, and absence of legislations and policies that are aligned towards its practice. The role of several educational theories like social constructivism, humanistic approach and universal design for learning (UDL) have been discussed to show their relevance in addressing challenges found in inclusive learning. Social Constructivism shows how collaborative work can be used inside the classrooms so that peer rejection will be lessened. The approach that is humanistic stresses about the comprehensive growth all individuals while addressing the needs of learners with disabilities. UDL focuses on promoting an accessible learning environment and eliminating physical barriers to foster successful growth for all students. Moreover, this article underlines relevance of awareness on how children with impairments can be incorporated into conventional classrooms and benefits which inclusive education has for both disabled and non disabled students. In conclusion, this paper emphasized the transformative nature of inclusive education in fostering a learning atmosphere that promotes diversity, empathy, and acceptance, contributing to students' overall development.

Keywords: Inclusive Education, Social Constructivism, Humanistic Approach, UDL

Introduction

Education is often referred to as society's equalizer (Singh et al., 2020) due to its potential to foster both intellectual and personal growth. But for years, the exclusion of diverse student groups and disadvantaged communities has been a problem in educational institutions around the world such as those with disabilities, individuals of various ethnic backgrounds, and individuals with lower socioeconomic positions. Faced with this difficulty, the idea of inclusive education has become a transformative catalyst for present-day pedagogy. By recognizing that everyone, despite their differences, has the right to an equitable and high-quality education, inclusive education represents a paradigm shift in education.

An educational strategy known as inclusive education supports settings where each student may study and feel appreciated as a member of the wider society ([Moriña, 2017](#)). It aims to make education accessible to all citizens, including those with disabilities ([Khasanah & Salim, 2018](#)). Its goal is to ensure that every student has equal opportunities for involvement, engagement, and achievement in their neighborhood public educational institution, thereby enhancing accessibility in the learning environment with great academic opportunities and results ([Ainscow, 2020](#); [Balansag et al., 2018](#); [Slee, 2018](#)).

In 1994, The International Assembly on Teaching Children with disability, a body associated with the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) produced a comprehensive document that aimed to address the educational concerns of individuals with disability. The Salamanca Statement highlights the significance of inclusive mainstream schools in eradicating prejudice, promoting inclusive settings, and guaranteeing fair educational opportunities for people, especially those with unique academic needs. In the years following the Salamanca declaration, the world community has made a continuous global initiative to support the inclusion of persons with impairments into society.

With policies and recommendations within several global organizations, inclusive education is specifically defined as incorporating many agreed-on desirable components drawn from a human rights perspective ([Hardy & Woodcock, 2015](#)). The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), adopted by the UN in 2006, played a pivotal role in advancing the significance of inclusive education. Article 24 of the CRPD recognizes the entitlement of disabled individuals to access education at the same opportunity as those without disabilities. This global accord marked a great advancement by acknowledging the need for inclusive education on a worldwide basis. According to the convention, individuals with disabilities must be given fair and equal opportunities to receive excellent, inclusive, and free education at the primary and secondary levels in their localities. This right should be ensured without discrimination, allowing them to receive education equal to their non-disabled peers.

Despite the worldwide and national policies on inclusive education having admirable intentions, we shouldn't forget that things rarely move as smoothly in practice as they do in law. Disabled children are the more disadvantaged and excluded minority in any current society ([Savarimuthu et al., 2021](#)). This highlights the significant problem of inequality and exclusion that these children encounter throughout various areas of life, encompassing school, healthcare, and social engagement. It follows that it is evident that learners with disabilities struggle to obtain fair access to a quality educational experience ([Singh et al., 2020](#)). Students with disabilities are currently encountering difficulties that involve a range of barriers, including facilities that are not accessible, a lack of adequate resources, and the necessity for personalized support. These factors lead to an educational inequity that requires attention and action.

Few nations have a precise definition of learners with disabilities. Even though several developing nations joined the UNCRPD in 2006, strategies for education often disregarded the needs of children with disability. It seems that involving disabled pupils in school is not a top concern ([Srivastava et al., 2015](#)). Implementing the principle of inclusive education also encounters global concerns, including differences among nations, disagreements regarding the definition and prioritization of inclusive education, issues related to access, inconsistent policies, inadequate teacher competencies, confusing documentation of outcomes, and obstacles arising from diverse national historical, social, and political traditions ([Haug, 2017](#)).

In our modern educational system and settings, is it possible to successfully implement the idea of inclusive education? Is inclusive education, which integrates students with disabilities into regular classrooms, the best approach, or does it create challenges for both teachers and students? In this paper, we will discuss the challenges and benefits of inclusive education and provide answers to whether this idea is really necessary for the holistic development of students.

Challenges and Barriers in Full Implementation of Inclusive Education

Inclusive education in the present day faces several obstacles to the integration of learners with impairments in mainstream classes. [Sree Priya's \(2016\)](#) study emphasized the significant obstacles encountered in implementing inclusive education which includes inadequate teacher preparation, rigid curriculum structures, limited support services, inadequate infrastructure, and gaps in knowledge among parents and educators regarding laws, regulations, and resources about to inclusion. Other major challenges and barriers are listed below.

Lack of Teachers' Training about Inclusive Education

Teachers who are key players in the teaching-learning process experience several challenges regarding inclusive education. Lack of professional training in dealing with students with disability is one of the obstacles to success in education ([Imaniah & Fitria, 2018](#); [Mag et al., 2017](#); [Materechera, 2020](#)). Teachers may encounter difficulties in establishing inclusive learning environments and delivering appropriate support if they have limited fundamental understanding and capacity required to accommodate the different requirements of learners with disabilities. This phenomenon may lead to the pupils' inability to fully realize their potential both academically and personally. Since numerous educators are unfamiliar with the teaching approach in inclusive education ([Zagona et al., 2017](#)), professional training is a must to choose the best pedagogies to apply rather than depending just on personal experience. Additionally, a lack of time and huge class sizes prevent several educators from properly implementing inclusive education ideas ([Materechera, 2020](#)).

Lack of Adequate Facilities and Learning Materials

Many educational settings in the modern-day schooling shows a lack of facilities and learning resources that will respond to the conditions of students with impairment. Some schools are still not set up to serve pupils with disabilities. Physical obstacles can have an impact on students with disabilities. Examples of these barriers include non-

inclusive sports programs, inadequately constructed classrooms, inaccessible facilities (such as a stair without ramps), and a lack of adaptive equipment (such as braille educational materials, translators for sign language, and screen readers). This underscores the need for educational institutions to adopt a comprehensive strategy to eliminate these physical barriers to ensure a welcoming educational setting that enables every student an equitable chance to succeed.

Social Integration and Peer Relationships

It is important to acknowledge that within inclusive educational settings, certain students with special needs may encounter instances of peer rejection, which could have negative implications for their social conduct and self-perception ([Chen et al., 2022](#)). The act of rejection may have negative consequences, especially about the individual's self-esteem of the students, which may result in decreased self-confidence and perhaps limit their social growth making it harder for them to build solid connections with their classmates. Some students with impairments may also face bullying because of their condition. This phenomenon may induce the feelings of loneliness and isolation among students with disability and may lead to increased stress and anxiety. Also, research performed by [Coelho \(2019\)](#) has indicated that the idea of inclusion may not always be suited for specific conditions, especially for those diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder (ASD). The complex social and sensory requirements may pose difficulties within inclusive environments, potentially hindering social growth and overall welfare. ASD individuals may struggle with social interactions and communication, impacting their ability to engage effectively in academic and social settings.

Parental Involvement and Support

Engaging parents and caregivers as partners in the inclusive education process is essential for success. However, lack of communication, understanding, or support from families can hinder effective implementation. Parents of disabled students have negative perception of the idea of joining student with disability and without disability due to concerns

about potential discrimination based on their child's condition ([Doménech & Moliner, 2014](#)). Such negative perceptions can hinder parents' willingness to embrace inclusive education initiatives, as they prioritize their child's emotional well-being and social acceptance.

Legal and Policy Barriers

Inadequate legislation, policies, or enforcement mechanisms related to inclusive education can impede progress. One of the factors contributing to challenges in the realm of inclusive education is a limited comprehension of regulations, issues and personalized assistance in this area ([Ford, 2013](#)). Educators, administrators, and stakeholders may find themselves struggling to navigate the complexities of legal frameworks, the complex environment of inclusive policies, and the art of individualized support for students with a variety of needs. Think of it like trying to put together a complicated puzzle without a clear picture on the box. This lack of understanding raises obstacles that impede the smooth use of inclusive practices.

Social Constructivism and its Relevance to Inclusive Education

Social constructivism is an educational theory that suggests learning is facilitated by social interaction and assistance from others, particularly within a group setting. It argues that individuals' acquisition of new information is influenced by their interactions within a social environment through collaborative learning, peer support, and customized instructional approaches, allowing students of all abilities to succeed and benefit from each other's learning experiences ([Natividad, 2022](#)). Social constructivism and inclusive education share the same idea due to their emphasis on social interaction, collaboration, and recognizing diverse perspectives. This approach is particularly beneficial in implementing inclusive education, and may use as the basis for addressing different obstacles in the idea of inclusion where students of all abilities can succeed.

The research conducted by [Parveen and Qounsar \(2018\)](#) demonstrates that students with disabilities experience enhanced peer interaction and communication skills through their interactions

with non-disabled peers. The presence of inclusive education settings promotes the development of social learning opportunities, facilitates the cultivation of healthy peer connections, and offers students with disabilities significant communicative examples to follow. Thus, the study's findings emphasize how inclusive education promotes a more accommodating and encouraging learning environment for students with impairments, which in turn benefits their social and communicative development.

[Kart and Kart \(2021\)](#) conducted research that emphasizes the positive consequences of integrating pupils with disabilities into regular classroom settings for those students without disabilities. Integrating students who have impairments into mainstream classrooms yielded social benefits for their classmates without impairments. The primary societal implications of inclusion encompass the mitigation of fear, hatred, conflict, and prejudice, while continuously encouraging compassion, acknowledgment, and empathy. This study emphasizes the considerable and advantageous influence of inclusive education, both in classroom settings and in creating more inclusive and empathetic communities. This also underscores the importance of fostering social harmony and cultivating a culture of mutual respect within a society that places high value on embracing diversity and promoting acceptance.

Social interaction between students with and without disabilities fosters acceptance, empathy, and understanding, which is important in reducing social relationship obstacles such as peer rejection within inclusive education. By participating in significant interactions with others and proper guidance, students may cultivate understanding, form bonds with one another, and recognize the distinct viewpoints and skills of one another. Social interaction may break down stereotypes, reduces prejudice, and creates inclusive societies where everyone feels respected and included by encouraging cooperation and teamwork in inclusive environments.

Integration of Humanistic Approach and Universal Design for Learning (UDL) in the Context of Inclusion

Humanistic Approach: Nurturing Individual Growth and Well-being

Humanistic education refers to an educational methodology that fosters the advancement of an individual's cognitive, affective, and interpersonal development. According to [Khatib et al. \(2013\)](#), the humanistic approach develops student autonomy and puts the learner as the central focus of the educational process. This approach prioritizes the importance of individuality, creativity, and critical thinking, which promotes a favorable learning environment that allows students to express their ideas, participate in self-discovery, and develop a sense of purpose in their educational pursuits to obtain their full capacity.

The primary aim of inclusive education is to develop a pedagogical approach that is rooted in humanism, characterized by adaptability, and capable of addressing the distinctive needs of every student ([Nabiullina, 2015](#)). Inclusive education, based on a humanistic perspective, ensures that all learners, especially those with unique needs or disabilities, are accepted into the regular classroom, provided with necessary support and resources. [Nigmatov \(2014\)](#) emphasizes that humanistic education holds significant importance within the context of inclusive education, as it strives to ensure equitable access to educational opportunities for everyone irrespective of their abilities or disabilities.

Various instructional approaches may be employed by educators to successfully adapt to the learning requirements of students, which includes those with impairments, within the context of inclusive education. According to [Ford \(2013\)](#), several instructional techniques may be employed while instructing individuals with learning difficulties. Firstly, co-teaching involves collaborative efforts between teachers to jointly plan lessons, deliver instruction, assess student progress, and maintain classroom management. Secondly, differentiated instruction entails the implementation of various teaching pedagogies and techniques tailored to fit the specific needs of every student. Lastly, peer-mediated instruction and interventions prioritize the role of peers in assisting learners

with impairments, particularly those with autism spectrum disorder (ASD), in acquiring new social abilities through enhancing interactions with others. With these strategies, students with disabilities will showcase their potential which can help in their holistic development.

Additionally, pre-service teacher trainings, administrative assistance, field practice programs, and policy support are some of the crucial areas that also need to be improved in implementing a successful inclusive education ([Scott, 2018](#)). The emphasis on inclusive education must be redirected towards improving the quality of teaching methods, with a particular focus on systematically developing teachers' skills and knowledge ([Haug, 2017](#)). Given that most educators claim to be only marginally equipped to instruct children with special needs, it is important that teachers get specialized training ([Marin, 2014](#)). By empowering teachers with the necessary training they need, they will gain the skills and knowledge to create a supportive and inclusive learning environment. Additionally, these trainings enable teachers to determine the individual needs of students, adapt flexible teaching methods, and implement effective strategies inside the classroom. Also, parental support and involvement are important in the successful execution of inclusive education as they contribute to the holistic development and academic success of students with diverse needs. Actively engaged parents provide invaluable insights into their child's strengths, challenges, and individualized needs, enabling educators to tailor instruction and support accordingly. By providing orientation and valuable knowledge to parents about the implications of inclusive education on the interpersonal, psychological, and emotional growth of students with disabilities, the success of the implementation will be more achievable.

Universal Design for Learning (UDL): Ensuring Accessible and Flexible Learning

UDL is an educational framework that aims to enhance and optimize the educational experience for individuals by using scientific understandings of human learning processes. The UDL framework should be the basis for inclusive education, offering a variety of flexible and diverse teaching techniques

to meet the requirements of all learners successfully. It may be utilized to guide teachers in the creation and implementation of courses to provide equitable accessibility to course materials for every student. The proactive approach acknowledges the unique needs, abilities, and learning preferences of individuals, to establish a conducive environment that fosters successful growth for all. This approach effectively eliminates barriers and guarantees that every student may use learning materials that is aligned with their individual preferences and needs.

In addition, the foundation of UDL is the idea that there is no one “best” method to learn and that all students gain by having a range of alternatives for accessing, comprehending, and presenting what they have learned. UDL should be taken into account when creating a curriculum to meet the requirements of all students and eliminate obstacles that might prevent them from receiving a high-quality education (Griggs & Moore, 2023). In aligning curriculum with inclusive education, we should engage diverse communities including parents, families, and educators, to understand the unique needs of learners with disabilities. Curriculum may be modified to accommodate the diverse learning preference and capabilities of students by providing different kinds of representation which includes supplying learning materials in different forms, utilization of assistive technologies, and offering individualized learning paths. Educational institutions must reform their rules and procedures to guarantee that education is inclusive allowing students to fully engage in the educational process (Manuel et al., 2024; Moriña, 2017). A research investigation done by Schreffler et al. (2019) demonstrates that implementing UDL in higher educational institutions can effectively reduce the barriers faced by learners with impairments in STEM training. Constructing classrooms that are readily accessible to all learners should be one of the major focuses of educational programs. Educational institutions’ learning environment must be completely accessible, and free from any physical obstacles (Moriña, 2019), and its spaces should be designed based on UDL. Moreover, studies have been carried out at high school levels to investigate the impact of universal design on learners with impairments, revealing significant enhancements (Rao et al., 2014).

Advantages and Significance of Inclusive Education

Inclusive education focuses on securing an equal opportunity for students to receive quality learning experiences. Sree Priya (2016) stated that the schools’ educational programs aim should be to promote comprehensive development in children, encompassing intellectual, physical, social, personal, and career aspects that enable learners with disabilities to acquire the skills necessary for independent living and to adapt to real-life settings, therefore eliminating their sense of inadequacy, limitations, and difference due to their disability. The author also emphasizes the advantages of inclusive education, which include bringing about effective systemic change that enables accessible education, creating an educational setting that is adaptable to students’ needs, and fostering active community involvement to establish connections among communities, families, and educational institutions.

Heiman (2004), as cited in (Ahmad & Rahman, 2017), identified four approaches that educators can adopt: full inclusion (practice of educating learners with disabilities with their mainstream peers), rejection of inclusion (where inclusive education is not practiced), two-teacher (where two teachers collaborate to teach a classroom with both mainstream and special education students), and in-and-out (where learners who have special needs divide their time between a mainstream class and a special education class). In cross-national research conducted in Israel and the United Kingdom, educators determined that the in-and-out inclusive education model is the most successful method in classroom instruction comprising students with learning impairments. This model enables these students to benefit from the combined experiences of both special education and regular education settings.

In a study conducted by Mackey (2014), the teaching methods employed by three middle school educators in the United States for teaching disabled students in general education were assessed. The study revealed that teachers had limited training in accommodating students with disabilities. However, they exhibit a favorable attitude toward integrating these students into their regular education

classrooms. Moreover, they developed and put into practice several significant instructional strategies for successful inclusion.

Students without disabilities also receive advantages from inclusive education. Engaging in interactive educational activities alongside peers who have special educational needs (SEN) promotes the development of respect, acceptance of differences, formation of new friendships, understanding of how to assist others, and cognitive growth through the process of explaining and learning from peers with SEN (Molina et al., 2021). This also enables children with special needs to enhance their interpersonal communication and acceptance among peers (Avcioğlu, 2017) and foster a diverse educational setting, socialization, and overall development of the students (Jacob & Olisaemeka, 2016). The significance of inclusive education in creating an environment that embraces all individuals and nurtures essential qualities such as empathy and kindness will be demonstrated by incorporating students with disabilities into a traditional educational setting (Vaghrodiya & Patel, 2022).

It is important to keep in mind that inclusive education aims to incorporate not just individuals who have traditionally been excluded from mainstream education, but also extends intentional effort to include everyone, valuing diversity as a fundamental practice rather than a secondary consideration (Florian, 2019). As stated by UNESCO, “Every learner is important and equally important,” meaning that every child, regardless of impairment, has the potential to become a remarkable human. Stephen Hawking’s accomplishments have shown that having a disability does not impede one’s potential to achieve success and make significant contributions to scientific knowledge. Schools should prioritize creating a learning environment that actively promotes inclusivity and valuing each person’s contribution, regardless of their background or traits. This will encourage a sense of belonging and ensure equity throughout the educational system.

Conclusion

This idea of inclusive education highlights the importance of giving equal opportunities to

individuals with impairments to learn and receive quality education in a regular classroom. In our modern-day education, inclusive education faces several challenges, including insufficient teacher training, inadequate facilities, difficulty in building social relationship among students, limited parental support, and lack of comprehensive legal frameworks. Overcoming these different barriers requires careful planning which involves the enhancements in administrative support, policy development, and teacher preparation, as well as the incorporation of various educational theories into practice. Social constructivism suggests the necessity for social interaction, collaboration, and recognition of various perspectives in establishing an inclusive and supportive educational setting. The incorporation of humanistic concepts into inclusive education emphasizes the significance of nurturing uniqueness, holistic growth, and a nurturing environment. In addition, the application of UDL serves as the basis and foundation for making educational learning accessible and responsive to the special needs of students. By acknowledging the worth of every individual and placing importance on inclusion, these ideas help create a learning atmosphere that cultivates empathy, kindness, and equality for all children, regardless of their capabilities or impairments. As a result, learners with disabilities can get significant advantages from inclusive education, since it enables them to receive an excellent educational experience inside a regular classroom setting.

The focus on building a community that values diversity acknowledges the needs of each individual, and actively works to promote understanding and connection draws attention to the significant influence inclusive education has on students’ overall development. Rather than just focusing on integration, inclusive education makes an effort to promote diversity as a fundamental principle, fostering empathy and acceptance, and guaranteeing equal opportunities across the educational system.

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