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INCLUSIVE EDUCATION IN PRACTICE: A CASE STUDY OF CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

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ABSTRACT

The present paper focuses upon Children with Special Needs (CWSN) and their school experiences in an inclusive set up. Adopting a qualitative approach, this study investigated both classroom and out-of-classroom experiences of CWSN and their perceptions about their teachers, peers, school environment. Self-identity of CWSN was an important aspect of the study. The research highlights how inclusive practices are being implemented within classrooms through supportive teacher behaviour, flexible teaching methods, and adapted instructional strategies that help students participate actively in learning. Many students reported feeling encouraged and valued by their teachers, which positively influenced their confidence and academic engagement. While academic inclusion has shown progress, challenges continue in peer interaction, participation in co-curricular activities, and access to infrastructure outside the classroom. Some children experienced difficulties in forming friendships or felt excluded during games and social activities. Limited accessibility and lack of awareness among peers were identified as important barriers to full participation. It suggests that regular peer sensitization programmes, collaborative learning opportunities, and stronger support systems involving teachers, parents, and school authorities are essential for building a truly inclusive and child-friendly educational set up where each of learner can sense of belongingness, respected, and empowered.

KEYWORDS: Inclusive Education, Children With Special Needs (CWSN), Peer Sensitisation, Teacher Sensitivity, Social Integration, Self-Perception, School Experiences

1. INTRODUCTION

Human development follows a common pattern, yet every individual grows and learns in a unique way. Even children belonging to the same family often differ in their appearance, interests, abilities, personality traits, and learning styles. These individual differences hold great significance in the field of education because no two learners are exactly alike. Every child possesses a unique combination of strengths, talents, challenges, and limitations. In this sense, all children are special. However, some children experience significant difficulties in areas such as reading, writing, reasoning, or mathematical conceptual understanding, which may affect their learning process and participation in school activities. Those children are referred as Children with Special Needs (CWSN). As per National Focus Group on Education of Children with Special Needs (NCERT, 2006), the extent of support required by these children depends on how far schools are able to change the curriculum, teaching methodologies, learning environment, and resources to fulfil their different needs. Inclusive Education evolved due to recognition of learner's diversity .Inclusive education means an educational approach in which all students learn in the same classroom environment irrespective of

Case Study

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their individual differences. It is a process through which schools expand their support systems to cater to the educational needs of every learner by creating supportive, flexible, and child-friendly environments. Inclusion is a holistic approach to education that support learners 'academic learning as well as socio emotional development. This encourages participation, equality, acceptance, and respect for diversity within the school community.

Today, inclusive education has emerged as an important aspect for global educational systems. International organizations and national governments have increasingly emphasized the principle of Education for All (EFA), which promotes equal educational opportunities for every child. The DAKAR FRAMEWORK FOR ACTION adopted at the World Education Forum (2000) strongly highlighted inclusive education as an essential strategy for achieving universal education. Following this vision, many countries, including India, have introduced policies and programmes to strengthen inclusive practices in mainstream schools. Legislative measures such as the RIGHT OF CHILDREN TO FREE AND COMPULSORY EDUCATION ACT (2009) and THE RIGHTS OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES (2016) further support the educational rights of children with disabilities and special needs in India. INCLUSIVE EDUCATION is not only about sitting of children with disabilities in the regular classrooms; but, having meaningful participation in different learning opportunities. It seeks to create a just and equitable society where differences are accepted as a natural part of human diversity. Schools are expected to provide appropriate support systems, teaching strategies, assistive devices, and emotional encouragement so that every learner can achieve their potential. Teachers play a vital role in this process because their sensitivity, attitudes, and teaching practices greatly influence the experiences of CWSN.

Schools are perceived as the foundation for intellectual, physical, emotional, moral, and social development; they can significantly shape the future of Children with Special Needs. Positive interactions with classmates and facilitators, supportive classroom environments, and opportunities for participation help children develop confidence and a sense of belonging. However, exclusion, discrimination, or inadequate support adversely affect their self-esteem and academic progress. Therefore, understanding the experiences of CWSN within inclusive schools becomes essential for evaluating the success of inclusive education practices. Inclusion can become meaningful only when the voices and experiences of CWSN are valued. Their experiences should be valued inside and outside the classrooms like in playgrounds, assemblies etc. These help educators understand the realities of inclusion and identify areas which require improvement. Thus, Inclusive Education is far more than an educational reform. It's a firm resolve to promote equality, dignity, and social justice for every learner.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 At Policy Level

Inclusive education in India has gained significant attention after the introduction of the MOE (Ministry of Education) policy framework under the NEP 2020. The policy emphasizes equitable and barrier-free education for all learners, especially Children with Special Needs (CWSN). This advocates a few changes like recruitment of special educators in every school and encourages the integration of technology-based learning tools to ensure meaningful participation of CWSN alongside their peers (Ministry of Education, 2020). The policy reflects a strong commitment toward inclusive schooling; however, the actual implementation at the school level remains uneven across many regions.

Supporting this concern, Ghulam Rasool (2024) examined inclusive education in the post-NEP era and highlighted the continuous gap between policy and practices in a classroom. The study observed that although the policy strongly addresses the needs of Socio-Economically Disadvantaged Groups (SEDGs), many schools in Delhi still lack proper infrastructure and inclusive facilities. The research further emphasized the need for dedicated funding to improve accessibility in classrooms, playgrounds, and common school spaces so that children with disabilities can experience inclusion beyond academics. This work provides an important framework for understanding how lack of financial support often weakens the practical implementation of inclusive education policies.

Another important policy-level initiative is NCERT's Prashast disability screening checklist (Ministry of Education, 2023). This screening tool enables regular classroom teachers to identify and understand different disabilities using proper terminology such as ADHD and Learning Disabilities (LD). The initiative supports early identification and helps teachers modify instructional practices according to individual learner needs. Together, these policy initiatives indicate that inclusive education is gradually moving from a traditional education to education based on the principles of equality and rights.

2.2 Teachers' Sensitivity and Instructional Pedagogy

Teacher attitude and classroom practices are an important part of inclusion education. M. A. Alassaf (2025) found that teacher sensitivity should be viewed as a professional competency rather than merely a personal quality. The study revealed that children with autism and ADHD showed significantly higher engagement when teachers maintained calm, trusting, and supportive communication. This finding suggests that emotionally responsive teaching practices positively influence participation and learning outcomes for CWSN.

Similarly, Universal Design for Learning (UDL) has emerged as an important pedagogical framework for inclusive classrooms. L. Goyibova et al. (2025) explained that inclusive environments become more effective when teaching methods are designed to accommodate all learners rather than only adapting for children with disabilities. Their findings indicate that modified instructional strategies benefit the entire classroom community and improve overall learning experiences.

Social participation is another critical dimension of inclusion. X. Luo et al. (2024) identified "social invisibility" as one of the greatest barriers faced by CWSN. The study argued that physical presence in mainstream classrooms does not automatically ensure social acceptance or meaningful participation. Many children remain excluded during lunch breaks, games, and peer interactions, which negatively affects their sense of belonging.

In addition, K. S. Seshadri and S. K. Dhanoa (2024) highlighted that peer rejection is higher in schools where peer sensitization programs are absent. Their study found that many students continue to view disability through a charity-based lens instead of an equity-based perspective. The authors emphasized that regular sensitization modules are necessary to create acceptance and respectful peer relationships within inclusive settings.

2.3 Self-Concept and Psychological Adjustment

Research also highlights the relationship between inclusive education and psychological well-being. R. Yudhani and U. Kaltsum (2023) found that differentiated instruction improves social development and self-confidence among CWSN. When tasks are designed according to a child's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), students develop aspirations and confidence similar to their peers. Academic achievement, therefore, contributes directly to positive self-esteem.

Earlier research by D. S. Smith and R. J. Nagale (1995) also emphasized that inclusive settings can support healthy social comparison and role modeling. However, the authors stressed that the presence of special educators in mainstream classrooms remains essential for sustaining meaningful inclusion.

2.4 Digital Accessibility and Assistive Technology

Technology plays a significant role in fostering Inclusion in a classroom. UNICEF and inclusive Education Initiative (2024) emphasized the use of affordable assistive technologies to improve participation for children with disabilities. The report highlighted that tools such as high-resolution visual aids and adaptive digital resources can significantly support learners with dyslexia and related difficulties. The study also recognized the physical environment and digital accessibility as important dimensions of inclusion.

Further extending this discussion, Hussain and Ahmed S. (2025) explored the role of Artificial Intelligence in personalizing education for neurodivergent learners. Their findings revealed that adaptive digital interfaces reduced academic frustration and improved independent task completion among children in inclusive settings. The study strongly

supports the integration of assistive and AI-based technologies within school ICT laboratories to create more supportive learning environments.

Inclusive education has become an important goal of modern educational systems, especially after policies such as the RTE ACT and the NEP 2020 emphasized equal educational opportunities for all children. Despite these developments, children with special needs (CWSN) continue to face challenges related to participation, peer acceptance, accessibility, and individualized support in mainstream schools. Most studies on inclusive education focus mainly on policies, teacher attitudes, or academic achievement, while the actual experiences and perceptions of children with special needs often remain underexplored. Therefore, this study is significant because it attempts to understand the lived experiences of CWSN within an inclusive school setting. By exploring their classroom experiences, out-of-classroom participation, and perceptions about school, teachers, peers, and self, the study provides critical insights into the implementation of practices related to Inclusive Education. The findings may help educators, policymakers, parents, and schools develop more supportive, child-centred, and learning environments for CWSN.

3. METHODOLOGY

This study explored the school experiences of Children with Special Needs and their perceptions about their teachers, classmates, and themselves within the school environment. Keeping these objectives in view, the study used both convenience and purposive sampling techniques. The participant's age group is from 7 years to 11 years. Since the research focused on gaining detailed and meaningful insights into their everyday school experiences, a small sample of four students was selected for in-depth exploration. In order to have an in depth understanding of children's academic and social experiences, their homeroom teachers and special educators were also included in the study through purposive sampling. Their perspectives helped in understanding the support systems, classroom interactions, and challenges faced by these learners in an inclusive setup. By following this approach, the researcher abled to gather rich qualitative information related to the lived experiences of the participants.

A brief profile of each student in the sample:

Table 1: Profile of student

Name of the Case	Grade	Sex	Age	Diagnosis	Areas of Intervention
Child A	II	M	9 Years	C.P. with spasticity (quadriplegic with 75% permanent impairment in relation to his all four limbs) with Ld.	Academics, motor, Language & Behaviour
Child B	II	M	7 Years	ADHD, moderate degree	Academics, Behaviour motor and language
Child C	V	F	12 years	Dyslexic (moderate), Learning difficulties	Academics, Organizational Skills, behavior.
Child D	IV	M	11 Years	Normal Intelli-gence with specific L.D.	Academics

As a tool for the study, school documents, questionnaire (rating scale type, multiple choice questions and one word/sentence completion type), researcher's diary and semi - structured interviews were used which included both types of questions i.e. open and closed. The data gathered from the questionnaire was organized in tabular form under themes emerged in line with objectives of the present study. The data gathered from researcher's diary was represented by using pen sketch method for each sample student and data from interview schedule was represented case wise to present an overall picture of the problem. The theme wise analysis of data was done.

4. FINDINGS

4.1 Classroom Experiences

The present study indicated that CWSN were generally treated equally in the inclusive classroom setting. At the same time, their individual learning needs were addressed through supportive teaching practices. Teachers made conscious efforts to involve these children actively in classroom discussions, activities, and learning processes. This helped the children feel included and valued as members of the class.

Different instructional strategies were adopted

according to the needs of each child. For instance, visual techniques such as colour coding and matching strategies were used for a child with cerebral palsy and learning difficulties, while step-by-step instructions and one-to-one support were provided to a student with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). Such practices created a positive classroom environment and encouraged participation among CWSN.

The findings also revealed that some academic difficulties still remained, particularly in language learning. Two children experienced challenges in understanding English, suggesting that the modifications used for language instruction were not fully effective. This highlights the need for more specialized interventions and individualized instructional approaches in inclusive classrooms.

4.2 Out-of-Classroom Experiences

The study found that children with special needs were enthusiastic about participating in games, theatre, sports, and other co-curricular activities conducted by the school. These activities provided opportunities for social interaction, confidence building, and enjoyment.

Despite this positive participation, one child with severe physical impairment could not fully experience these activities because the school lacked alternative facilities suited to the child's interests and abilities. This finding suggests that while schools may promote inclusion in academics, equal attention must also be given to make extracurricular activities available to all children. Inclusive Education should extend beyond classrooms and ensure equal opportunities across all aspects of school life.

4.3 Perceptions about School, Teachers, and Peers

I. Perceptions about School

All the children expressed positive feelings about being in school, although their reasons differed. Some enjoyed learning activities, while others appreciated the social environment and opportunities for interaction. Their responses indicated that inclusive schools help children to feel a sense of belongingness and emotional safety.

The school as a whole seems to play a vital role in overall growth and development of CWSN. The opportunity to study alongside peers helped CWSN feel accepted and included in the mainstream educational setting.

II. Perceptions about Teachers

The children described their teachers as supportive, caring, friendly, and motivating. They believed that teachers encouraged them to participate actively and helped them whenever difficulties arose. Positive attitudes of facilitators played an important role in shaping school experiences of Children with Special Needs.

The findings indicated that facilitators in the inclusive setup demonstrated sensitivity towards CWSN's needs. The success of inclusive education influenced by the attitude of school teachers which should be positive in nature because children are more likely to participate confidently when they feel respected and understood by their teachers.

III. Perceptions about Peers

The findings regarding peer relationships were mixed. Two children shared healthy and supportive relationships with classmates and viewed their peers as helpful and cooperative. Positive peer interactions helped these children feel comfortable and socially accepted in school.

However, two children faced difficulties in forming positive peer relationships. Behavioural challenges and social adjustment issues affected peer acceptance in certain cases. Some children experienced exclusion or found it difficult to interact comfortably with classmates. This indicates that peer sensitization and social support are essential components of successful inclusion.

IV. Perception about Self in Context of the School

The research revealed that a school environment which is inclusive in nature had a positive influence on children's perceptions about themselves. Children with special needs did not see themselves as significantly different from their peers. Like other children, they had dreams, ambitions, and aspirations for their future.

The children expressed goals such as becoming

teachers or doctors, showing confidence and hope regarding their future. Inclusive education appeared to strengthen their self-esteem and self-concept by providing opportunities for participation, interaction, and achievement within the school environment.

5. DISCUSSION

5.1 Discussion on Classroom Experiences

The findings show that inclusion was practiced positively in the sample school, as teachers addressed the diverse needs of CWSN (children with special needs). Inclusive education emphasizes accepting diversity and making sure that all children participate meaningfully in all activities. Teachers adopted varied teaching methodologies as per the needs of individual learners, which reflects the principles of inclusive pedagogy.

At the same time, the study highlighted certain limitations in language instruction, mainly for children with Learning Difficulties. Students with Learning Disabilities often found challenges in reading and language processing because of challenges in connecting sounds with written symbols (Stanovich, 1994). Therefore, individualized teaching plans, specialized interventions, and continuous support from teachers and special educators are necessary for effective inclusion.

5.2 Discussion on Out-of-Classroom Experiences

Academic participation alone cannot fulfil the objectives of inclusive education. These learners also have the right to participate equally in sports, cultural activities, and recreational experiences. Although most children enjoyed school activities, the absence of suitable alternative facilities for one child revealed gaps in infrastructure and planning.

This finding emphasizes the importance of making schools physically accessible and designing activities that accommodate diverse abilities. Schools need to develop inclusive infrastructure and flexible programs so that every child can participate fully.

5.3 Discussion on Perceptions about School, Teachers, and Peers

The positive perceptions of school suggest that inclusive environments can support emotional and social well-being. When children feel welcomed and accepted, their confidence and participation improve significantly.

Teachers were viewed positively because they created supportive and encouraging classroom environments. Previous research has identified teacher attitude as one of the most important factors influencing successful inclusive education (Dickens-Smith, 1995). Friendly and understanding teachers help children feel secure and motivated.

Peer relationships, however, presented both positive and challenging experiences. Strong friendships supported adjustment and social development, while rejection or exclusion negatively affected some children. Positive peer interaction is essential because friendships contribute significantly to emotional well-being and school adjustment (Parker & Asher, 1993). Teachers and parents therefore have an important role in encouraging peer acceptance and developing positive social environments within schools.

5.4 Discussion on Self-Perception

The study demonstrated that inclusive settings positively influenced children's self-esteem and self-concept. Interaction with peers and participation in school activities helped children view themselves confidently and develop aspirations similar to those of other students.

Inclusive education promotes holistic development of all learners. When children are treated equally and provided with opportunities to participate meaningfully, they begin to see themselves as capable and valued members of society.

6. CONCLUSION

The study explored the experiences of Children with Special Needs in an inclusive set up to examine their perceptions about school, teachers, peers, and themselves. The findings indicate that inclusive education positively influences learners' academic participation, emotional development. Self-confidence also develops when appropriate support systems are available in a school. CWSN generally reported positive experiences in classrooms and expressed favourable perceptions about their teachers and school environment. Teachers played

a significant role in promoting inclusion through supportive attitudes and individualized teaching strategies. However, peer relationships varied among the children, showing that social inclusion requires continuous effort and sensitization programs. The study also highlighted the need for improvements in extracurricular accessibility, infrastructure, and specialized instructional support. Special educators, teachers and parents have to work in a collaboration to create meaningful inclusive experience Children with Special Needs.

Overall, this study suggests that Inclusive Education can become more effective through teacher training, curriculum adaptation, assistive technologies, and supportive school environments. Such measures can help ensure that children with special needs experience not only academic success but also dignity, belongingness, and equal participation in school life.

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