

# ROLE OF INCLUSIVE EDUCATION PRACTICES IN TERMS OF ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL RETURNS TO BUILD A KNOWLEDGE SOCIETY

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## Abstract

**Background:** Recognizing Education as a basic human right that contributes not only to an individual's development but also to the economic and social development of a country, educational provisions aim at ensuring equal educational opportunities to all without any discrimination. One positive step towards this is Inclusive education. This research work aims to study teachers' beliefs towards inclusive education practices in terms of their social and economic returns to building a knowledge society.

**Methods:** Inclusive schools in the Amritsar district of Punjab, India was the population for the study, and three schools were selected using the Purposive sampling technique. A total of 27 responses were recorded from teachers. A self-prepared questionnaire consisting of a total of 38 items categorized into eight dimensions was administered for data collection. An online survey-based platform was used for distributing the questionnaire online. Data Analysis was carried out using percentage analysis.

**Results:** More than 80% of teachers believe that inclusive education practices provide good economic returns to individuals and society in terms of salaries, demand, job identity in a vocational place, etc. Similar responses were recorded regarding their beliefs about the social returns of inclusive education practices. A highly positive response rate was recorded about the role of inclusive education practices in building a knowledge society.

**Conclusion:** By ensuring equal educational opportunities for all, inclusive education ensures improved economic and social returns on one hand and contributes to building a knowledge society on other hand.

**Keywords:** *Inclusive Education, Social return, Economic return, Knowledge Society.*

## Introduction

Inclusive Education means the process of educating children with special needs (CWSNs) alongside their peers in mainstream schools. In education, the concept of CWSN had a British origin when the report of the Government commission under the chairmanship of Baroness Mary Warnock (1978) emphasized the identification of educational difficulties of children and accommodating them accordingly. Later Special educational needs (SEN) became a part of educational legislation and

teaching-learning processes in the UK (Clough and Corbett, 2000). Although SEN is not legally defined in India still this is widely used in India.

Recognizing the educational needs of children with disabilities and a commitment to place Children with SEN in a wider context of education (Barton, 1998), various educational programs and schemes lay down worldwide. Initially, special education, compensatory education, or remedial education addressed the educational needs of CWD. The concept of special education was introduced with the development of the First special school for the deaf in Kentucky. But the inability of residential and special schools to accommodate the needs of all children with disabilities and the drawback of segregation of CWD from mainstream education opportunities attracted discussions on exploring new avenues for opening the doors of regular schools to them. The concept of Integration came in late 1978 that aim at bringing the CWSN to mainstream schools initially on a part-time basis and later on a full-time basis. Integrated education gained popularity and was a highly favored practice worldwide.

But the trend now is to develop a single education system where every child is valued irrespective of the type of disability, cultural or ethnic background, etc. The term Inclusive Education originated which is referred to all learners- with or without disabilities being able to learn together in an ordinary educational setting with an appropriate network of support services (Kauts, 2018). "Inclusion needs to be the norm" as stated by world conference on special needs education in Salamanca, Spain. Getting endorsed by major international organizations such as UNESCO, UNICEF, and UNDP and being prioritized by various national governments in their educational policies, Inclusive education gained momentum since the Salamanca conference (UNESCO, 2000).

India was one of the countries that made significant efforts toward the promotion of an inclusive education system in their educational laws and policies. In India, special education was initiated with the establishment of the first special school for the deaf in Bombay in 1883 and the first school for the blind in Amritsar in 1887. The number of such schools continues to rise and special efforts were made to prepare teachers for such an educational setup. But realizing that special schools are developing a separate disability culture, efforts were made to move towards Integration following the international trend, IEDC scheme (1974) (Annual report 2005-06, MHRD), PIED (1987) (NCERT, 1987), NEP 1986, and POA 2002 emphasize integrating (basically placing) children with special needs with others and training teachers to work with disabled children (Azad, 1996). Inclusive education aims at achieving a way of life in educational institutions where everyone is valued and respected for their varied knowledge and experiences (Bindal and Sharma, 2010) and schools take the responsibility to accept the child and respond (Kauts, 2018). Inclusive education was added to DPEP in the late nineties. The thrust was on providing quality education to CWSN.

The Indian constitution, legislation, and educational policies strongly favored the principle of inclusion. The Persons with Disabilities (Equal Opportunities, Protection of Rights and Full Participation) Act 1995 stressed the need to provide free of cost education to all children in an appropriate environment till the age of 18 years (SSA, 2006). One of the most important steps is Constitution (86th amendment) Act 2002, according to which education is now a fundamental right of all children in the age group of 6-14 years. To serve the needs of all children, reasonable modification in an educational environment, building teachers' capacities to deal with CWSN and pedagogical competencies (Julka, 2001), and suitable adaption in teaching-learning activities are necessitated (The rights of persons with disabilities Bill 2012; UNESCO, 2019). It is a process that requires educational institutions to restructure resources, personnel, and curriculum to accept and utilize diversity (International Encyclopedia of Inclusive Education). Inclusive educational practices suggested by various education commissions, programs, and policies in India include modification in curriculum,

transaction strategies (Agran, Snow, and Swaner, 2009), classroom services (NCF for school education), educational placements, resource support, teacher training, individual educational plan, and removal of architectural barriers (SSA 2001). Equity and inclusion are now at the heart of NEP 2020.

Returns to investment in education are plentiful. Human resource development ensures the long-term development of a country (Tilak, 2005). The returns that strengthen the society economically are called economic returns such as employability, higher earnings, less unemployment, higher productivity, non-wage discrimination, etc. The returns that develop the society are called social returns such as slower crime rates, better social and political awareness, better voter participation, better self, and social identity, better social cohesion, consumption efficiency, job search efficiency, etc. For the development of an inclusive society, inclusive education is the first step. Inclusive education further helps in the inclusive growth of the economy through its significant contribution to making citizens more productive resources to the country. Investment in inclusive education will surely help in achieving sustainable development goals as well. NEP 2020 aims at developing a knowledge society and a super-knowledge economy in every aspect. A knowledge society requires every citizen to be productive which results in a knowledge economy on one hand and an inclusive economy on the other hand. Thus, the goal of transforming India into a knowledge society can be achieved by setting up an inclusive education structure. The returns to education and level of education are found to be positively correlated (Aggarwal, 2012). The present study aims at studying the inclusive education practices followed in inclusive schools and teachers' beliefs regarding the benefits of such practices in terms of economic and social returns in building a knowledge society.

## Materials and Methods

The descriptive method was employed to collect data about inclusive education practices from different secondary sources and the survey method was used to collect data about the role of such practices in economic and social returns in building a knowledge society from the respondents.

## Sampling technique

Inclusive schools in the Amritsar district of Punjab (India) were the population for the study. The purposive sampling technique was used to select three inclusive schools for data collection. Consent from Schools principals and teachers was obtained before the administration of the tool. A total of 27 responses were obtained from teachers teaching senior secondary classes in these schools.

## Tool

For the present study, a self-prepared questionnaire "Perception of teachers towards economic and social returns to be a knowledge society in inclusive settings" was used for data collection. An in-depth study of inclusive education practices and policies was carried out to determine indicators as per the policies. Indicators were further categorized into eight dimensions namely, High expectations and least dangerous assumptions, availability of required infrastructure and human resources, curriculum instructions and support, evaluation and grading, assessment, economic returns to education, social returns to education, and building a knowledge society. The questionnaire was formulated in the English language consisting of thirty-eight items divided into eight dimensions. Close-ended questionnaire design with yes or no responses was used.

## Data source

Teachers teaching classes XI and XII in inclusive schools in the Amritsar district of Punjab (India) that are following inclusive education practices were the target population for the study. Using the purposive sampling method, three inclusive schools were considered as a sample for data collection. The E- questionnaire was developed by the means of Google forms. Questionnaires were emailed to

teachers from selected schools. Data were collected from a total of 27 teachers from three schools. Data analysis was carried out using percentage analysis.

**Results**

Table 1 shows the responses of teachers about the items under the first dimension i.e High expectations with the least dangerous assumptions. 48% of the teachers admitted to making predictions that students will never acquire certain knowledge or skills. This means they show less confidence in the capabilities of CWDNs. Most teachers have direct conversations with students rather than through a paraprofessional or other person.

About the second dimension i.e. Availability of infrastructure and human resources, approximately 30% of teachers admit that institutions do not have the required assistive technology devices to teach students with learning disabilities. 22 % of teachers admitted the lack of physical access to the facilities to reach different areas of schools and 26% of the teachers also felt the non-availability of well-educated special educators to teach children with disabilities. The basic requirements such as physical infrastructure and the availability of specialist teachers in inclusive setups are lacking. Even the non-availability of assistive technologies is another point of concern taking into consideration the role these can play in education of costs.

For the third Dimension i.e. Curriculum, instructions, and support, approximately 45% of teachers admit that the curriculum is not presented in a variety of accessible formats. Non-reflection of the principle of UDL and the learning styles in the instructions is admitted by 30% of the teachers and 15% of the teachers respectively. Even 41% of the teachers do not prioritize research-based strategies for increasing learners’ achievements. Providing support within general education classes to enable the students with disabilities to benefit from the general education curriculum and other inclusive learning activities is vital but 30% of the teachers admitted the lack of the same as well. But most of the teachers admit that the instructions are provided in multiple formats. The above statistics are a clear reflection of the requirement to pay attention to curriculum, instruction, and support dimensions on a priority basis.

Another important reflection is from the results of the evaluation and grading dimension, 37% of teachers feel that evaluation does not include the criteria for judging success that reflects general education curriculum standards and IEP Goals and Objectives. Even evaluation doesn’t allow students to receive grades that reflect personal best achievement and improvement as agreed by approximately 22% of the teachers. Evaluation and grading should also be targeted to reflect curriculum standards and individualized educational plans.

Regarding the assessment, Assessment reports are found to reflect students’ abilities and needs instead of deficits and weaknesses, and ongoing dynamic assessments are used rather than one-time assessment tools as admitted by 85% of teachers. 33% of teachers feel that the assessment doesn’t reflect the present level of performance statements on the IEP. Even assessment tools are not changed as per the communication difficulties of the children as agreed by 19% of teachers. Assessment procedures need to be flexible in nature.

Table 1

**Percentage-wise analysis of teacher's beliefs about the inclusive education practices**

Items under different indicators	Response Percentage
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	YES (%)	NO (%)
<b>1. High expectations with the least dangerous assumptions</b>		
1.1 Predictions are made that students will never acquire certain knowledge or skills.	48.1	51.9
1.2 Teachers speak directly to the student rather than through a paraprofessional or other person.	85.1	14.9
<b>2. Availability of required infrastructure and human resources</b>		
2.1 Institutions have required assistive technology devices to teach students with a learning disability	70.3	29.7
2.2 Students have physical access to the facilities to reach different areas of schools through elevators, ramps, or passageways	77.7	22.3
2.3 institutions have well-educated special educators to teach children with disabilities.	74	26
<b>3. Curriculum, instruction, and support</b>		
3.1 Curriculum is presented in a variety of accessible formats	55.5	44.5
3.2 Instructions reflect the principle of UDL (Multiple means of presentation, expression, and engagement)	70.3	29.7
3.3 Instructions reflect the learning styles of all the learners	85.1	14.9
3.4 Instructions prioritize the use of research-based strategies for increasing learners' achievements	59.25	40.75
3.5 Instructions are provided in multiple formats (individual, pairs or small groups, etc.)	92.5	7.5
3.6 Supports are provided within general education classes to enable the students with disabilities to benefit from the general education curriculum and other inclusive learning activities.	70.3	29.7
<b>4. Evaluation and Grading</b>		
4.1 Evaluation includes criteria for judging success that reflects general education curriculum standards and IEP Goals and Objective	62.9	37.1
4.2 Evaluation allows students to receive grades that reflect their personal best achievement and improvement	77.7	22.3
<b>5. Assessment</b>		
5.1 Assessment reflects the present level of performance statements on the IEP reflecting the student's abilities, talents and skills, learning styles, and learners' needs	66.6	33.4
5.2 Assessment reports reflect the student's abilities and needs instead of deficits and weaknesses	85.1	14.9
5.3 If students have any difficulty in communication, assessment tools and strategies are chosen accordingly	81.4	18.6
5.4 Teachers use ongoing dynamic assessments rather than one-time assessment tools.	85.1	14.9

Table 2 represents teachers' beliefs regarding the role of inclusive education practice in bringing economic returns. Teaching CWDNs together with children without disabilities in inclusive setups is admitted to be helpful for CWDNs to acquire better and extraordinary skills that enhance their demands

in the job market or their earnings, to be more skillful and educated, improving the possibilities for them in the job market, and enhancing their confidence to be an asset for the economy, enhancing their contribution in national productivity and thereby providing better human capital to the nation. Such inclusive settings are believed to provide CWDNs such practical experiences and training that help them in establishing a better identity in the workplace on one hand and enable them to become self-dependent socially as well as economically by seeing their disabilities as abilities on the other hand. Thus, most of the teachers admitted the potential of inclusive education practices in bringing economic returns.

But 33% of teachers agreed that the state doesn't provide better salaries to educated and skilled human resources for their respective work. This research finding is an important area to pay attention to for the government.

Table 2

**Percentage-wise analysis of teacher's beliefs about the role of inclusive education practices in bringing economic returns**

Items under the 6th Dimension	Response percentage	
	Yes %	No %
6.1 Teaching learners with and without disabilities together in an inclusive environment provide better human capital to the nation	81.4	18.6
6.2 Teaching CWDN in an inclusive setup improves the possibilities in the job market for them along with their peers	85.1	14.9
6.3 Inclusive education opportunities enhance the confidence of students to become an asset to the economy	81.4	18.6
6.4 Inclusive education provides more skilled and educated individuals	85.1	14.9
6.5 In an inclusive setup, children with disabilities get acquire better and extraordinary skills that enhance their demand and earnings	85.1	14.9
6.6 Skilled and educated human resources contribute to enhancing the productivity of the economy	88.8	11.2
6.7 Practical experiences and training in an inclusive setup help learners in establishing their better identity in the workplace	85.1	14.9
6.8 States also provide better salaries to educated and skilled human resources for their work	66.6	33.4
6.9 Inclusive education enables CWSNs to see their disabilities as abilities to become self-dependent socially as well as economically.	81.4	18.6

Table 3 represents teachers' beliefs regarding the role of inclusive education practice in bringing social returns. Teachers agreed that inclusive education practices bring social returns by uplifting the social status of CWDNs along with their peers, increasing citizens' consideration of public affairs and their rights in all aspects, reducing criminal behavior arising out of fears and disabilities, and being emotionally and socially balanced thereby helping them to earn respect in society. Educated youth in such an educational setup has the potential to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development goals. Equal educational opportunities also result in equal distribution of income and wealth.

But 33% of teachers admitted that educated youth in cities or districts doesn't lead to less increase in the population of their respective city or district, which is an important outcome, especially in the present situation when India is the second leading nation in terms of population after China.

Table 3

**Percentage-wise analysis of teacher's beliefs about the role of inclusive education practices in bringing social returns**

Items under the 7th Dimension	Response rate	
	Yes	No
7.1 Inclusive education helps in uplifting the social status of students with disabilities along with others	92.5	7.5
7.2 Equal education opportunities provided by inclusive education increase citizens' considerations of public affairs and their rights in all aspects	85.1	14.9
7.3 Education reduces criminal behavior of an individual that arises out of their fears and disabilities	92.5	7.5
7.4 Students with good education are emotionally and socially balanced due to which they earn respect in society	81.4	18.6
7.5 Cities and districts with educated youth lead to less increase in the population of that city or district	66.6	33.4
7.6 Equal opportunities that Inclusive education provides further lead to the equal distribution of income and wealth	85.1	14.9
7.7 Educated youth helps in the achievement of sustainable development goals of the economy in different sectors.	81.4	18.6

Table 4 represents the teacher's beliefs about the role of inclusive education practices in building a knowledge society. Inclusive education is believed to have the potential to encourage learners to use existing and new technology and knowledge efficiently and to be an invocation in educational institutions that generates local knowledge, and new technology by adapting global knowledge. Thus, the Transformation of society into a knowledge economy is believed to be possible through inclusion.

But 30% of teachers denied the statement that a more educated society tends to be more technologically sophisticated, generating higher demands for knowledge, and the statement representing that the increased knowledge flow reduces transaction costs that could bring greater communication productivity has also been disagreed by 22% of teachers. This research finding has great implications when education is expected to enable learners to be technologically sophisticated. Enhancing communication productivity to bring economies is another area of consideration for the nations providing inclusive education setups to build a knowledge society.

Table 4

**Percentage-wise analysis of teacher's beliefs about the role of inclusive education practices in building a knowledge society**

Items under the 8th Dimension	Response Percentage	
	Yes %	No %
8.1 With the use of inclusive education practices, society transforms into a knowledge economy	81.4	18.6
8.2 Inclusive education is a regime that helps to provide incentives to students and encourages the use of existing and new technology and knowledge efficiently	88.8	11.2
8.3 Increasing knowledge flow reduces transaction costs leading to	77.7	22.3

greater communication productivity		
8.4 More educated society tends to be more technologically sophisticated, generating higher demands for knowledge	70.3	29.7
8.5 Best inclusive practices are an invocation in educational institutions that generates local knowledge, and new technology by adapting global knowledge.	92.5	7.5

**Discussions**

This research work was designed to study the teacher's belief toward Inclusive education practices in terms of their social and economic returns to building a knowledge society. The results showed that approximately half the teachers (48 %) make predictions about the students that they will never acquire certain knowledge or skills. This reflects the teacher's perception of the CWDN inabilities.

Technology is supposed to be a helping hand in inclusive education setup. It is found that the required assistive technology to teach learners with learning disabilities is available but this is in contrast with the findings of Sood and Agnihotri (2015) who found that only 30% of schools are using assistive technology for CWDN. Availability of all physical facilities such as ramps or elevators were also found to be suitably available representing a good picture of infrastructural support for inclusion. Sood and Agnihotri (2015) also found that 60% of schools have physical facilities such as ramps to support CWDN. But the 22% of teachers who felt the lack of provision of such physical access to such facilities is an important area of consideration. Required human resource support to improve the inclusive education practices in schools i.e. the educated special educators for CWDN also found to be suitably available. But in Kaul's (2015, 2018) study 68.89% of the teachers expressed the non-availability of special educators and in the study of Corcoran, B. (1995) only 16 % of schools were found to be provided with specialized resources and materials.

Regarding the curriculum, instruction, and presentation support, the agreement of a majority of the teachers on the consideration of different learning styles of all the learners and providing instructions in multiple formats is a very positive step towards accommodating the educational needs of all learners. But the disagreement of teachers on the use of UDL principles-based instruction, research-based strategies, and providing required support within general education classes that could help CWDNs to get benefit from the general education curriculum are important areas to work on for the teachers working in such setups. The need for rethinking and restructuring curriculum, practices, and learning environment cannot be overlooked if the diverse needs of CWDNs are to be fulfilled. Teachers need to be trained in designing instructional methods for CWDNs (Das and Shah, 2014). Teachers agreed that the Evaluation system has also been modified such that it allows students to get grades that reflect their best personal achievements and improvements and that too with criteria reflecting general education curriculum standards and IEP goals. But again, the percentage of teachers who disagreed can't be overlooked.

Sound ongoing assessment practices are found to be used that shows learners' abilities and needs instead of their weakness or deficits and that is made flexible enough to make necessary changes in case any communication problems are faced by learners. But the focus should be on ensuring that the assessment procedures should reflect the present level of learner performance on IEP. Schools should be given resources to train teachers in assessment procedures as well (Peters, 2004).

A high percentage of teachers believe that inclusive education practices bring economic returns by enabling CWDN to be a skillful and productive asset to the economy. But the teacher's belief regarding the lack of the provision of better salaries to educated and skilled human resources for their respective work by the state is an important area of concern for the government.



Inclusive education practices have the potential in bringing social returns and transforming society into a knowledge economy. Best inclusive education practices are found to be an invocation in educational institutions that generates local knowledge, and new technology by adapting global knowledge. But the teacher's disagreement with the statement representing that the enhanced knowledge flow brings communication productivity and results in a more technologically sophisticated society are important findings that question the potential of inclusive education practices in building a knowledge society. Implementation of inclusive education practices importantly depends on teachers' attitudes and beliefs about inclusion and the findings are representing the same having multiple implications for various stakeholders working in inclusive education setups.

## Conclusion

Inclusive education is an important step toward the creation of an inclusive society. Inclusive education practices not only bring CWDN to schools but also build their capacities and competencies. Such competencies help them in living productively in society and make them economically self-dependent as well. Recognizing the role of inclusive education practices in building a knowledge society, the Government is also making and amending educational provisions that ensure an inclusive educational environment for all learners. Apart from making necessary changes in the different aspects of the educational process such as curriculum, instructions, and evaluation, ensuring the provision of adequate salaries to teachers as per their skills and expertise is an important area of attention for states. Education institutions are also taking necessary steps to move towards inclusion.

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