

Role of Teachers in Inclusive Education in India

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Abstract:

Inclusive education is an approach that ensures the participation, learning and development of all children, including children with disabilities and those facing social, linguistic, economic or cultural disadvantages. In India, the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016, defines inclusive education as a system in which students with and without disabilities learn together and in which teaching-learning processes are suitably adapted to meet diverse learning needs. The success of this legal and policy vision depends substantially on teachers because they translate constitutional rights, educational policies and institutional provisions into everyday classroom practice. This article examines the role of teachers in inclusive education in India, with particular focus on teachers' attitudes, differentiated pedagogy, curriculum adaptation, assessment, collaboration, assistive technology, family participation and professional development. It also discusses major challenges and suggests measures for strengthening teacher preparedness and school-level support.

Keywords: *Inclusive education, teachers, disability, differentiated instruction, RPwD Act 2016, NEP 2020, teacher education, India*

Introduction

Education is a fundamental instrument for equality, dignity and social participation. Inclusive education is not limited to placing children with disabilities in regular schools; it requires the transformation of school culture, curriculum,

pedagogy, assessment and support systems so that every learner can participate meaningfully. Inclusive education therefore shifts the responsibility from the child to the educational system. The school must adapt itself to learner diversity rather than expecting every child to adjust to a rigid system.

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 places equity and inclusion at the centre of educational planning. It emphasises respect for diversity, recognition of each learner's unique capabilities, multilingualism, flexible pedagogy, formative assessment and the use of technology to increase access for students with disabilities. However, policy provisions alone cannot create inclusive classrooms. Teachers are the principal agents who determine whether a child is welcomed, supported, taught and assessed fairly.

Research published in the *Journal of Indian Education* identifies teachers as primary agents in implementing inclusive education. It further indicates that teachers' beliefs, attitudes, knowledge and professional competence influence their classroom practices and the educational participation of children with disabilities.

Conceptual Understanding of Inclusive Education

The RPwD Act, 2016, provides a rights-based foundation for inclusive education in India. Section 2(m) defines inclusive education as a system in which students with and without disabilities learn together and teaching-learning processes are adapted to meet the learning needs of different students with disabilities.

Section 16 of the Act requires educational institutions to:

- Admit children with disabilities without discrimination.
- Provide equal opportunities in academic, sports and recreational activities.
- Ensure accessibility of buildings, campuses and facilities.
- Provide reasonable accommodation according to individual requirements.
- Offer individualised or other necessary support.
- Use appropriate languages and communication modes for learners who are blind or deaf.
- Detect specific learning disabilities at an early stage.
- Monitor participation, progress and completion of education.

Section 17 further requires measures such as teacher training, preparation of teachers in sign language and Braille, resource centres, assistive devices, accessible learning materials and modifications in curriculum and examinations. These provisions establish that the teacher's role is not merely instructional; it is also protective, collaborative, diagnostic and rights-oriented.

Major Roles of Teachers

1. Developing an inclusive attitude

The teacher's attitude is one of the strongest determinants of successful inclusion. A positive teacher recognises disability as a dimension of human diversity rather than as a deficiency. Such a teacher avoids labelling, pity, segregation and low expectations. Teachers communicate their attitudes through language, seating arrangements, classroom interactions, feedback and opportunities given to learners. When teachers believe that every child can learn, they are

more willing to adapt teaching methods, provide additional time and encourage participation. Conversely, negative expectations may lead to exclusion, neglect or the informal segregation of children with disabilities within the classroom.

Inclusive attitudes should be reflected in:

- Respectful and non-discriminatory language.
- Equal opportunities for participation.
- High but realistic expectations.
- Recognition of individual strengths.
- Prevention of bullying, ridicule and social isolation.
- Respect for learner dignity, privacy and autonomy.

2. Identifying learning needs

Teachers interact with learners regularly and are often the first professionals to notice learning, communication, behavioural or sensory difficulties. They should observe learners systematically rather than relying on assumptions or stereotypes.

Identification may include observation of:

- Difficulties in reading, writing or numeracy.
- Delayed language or communication.
- Problems with attention, memory or processing.
- Hearing or visual difficulties.
- Physical barriers affecting participation.
- Anxiety, social withdrawal or repeated absenteeism.
- Unusual patterns of behaviour or classroom engagement.

The teacher should not independently diagnose a disability. Instead, observations should be documented and shared with parents, special educators, counsellors and appropriate professionals. Early identification enables timely pedagogical support and reduces the risk of failure and dropout.

3. Planning differentiated instruction

Inclusive classrooms contain learners with different abilities, languages, interests, backgrounds and learning speeds. Therefore, a uniform teaching method is insufficient. Teachers need to differentiate content, process, learning materials and expected outcomes.

Examples of differentiated instruction include:

- Presenting information through visual, auditory, tactile and experiential methods.
- Breaking complex tasks into smaller steps.

- Using concrete materials before abstract explanations.
- Providing graphic organisers, pictures, models and demonstrations.
- Offering individual, pair and group activities.
- Allowing learners to demonstrate understanding through speech, writing, drawing, performance or technology.
- Providing repetition, scaffolding and additional practice.
- Using peer tutoring and cooperative learning.

For example, while teaching the concept of fractions, a teacher may use paper folding, fraction circles, oral explanation, pictorial representation and digital simulations. This benefits not only a learner with a disability but the entire class.

4. Adapting the curriculum

Curriculum adaptation does not mean removing meaningful learning opportunities. It means modifying the curriculum so that learners can access essential knowledge and demonstrate learning in appropriate ways.

Teachers may adapt:

- The level of complexity.
- The amount of written work.
- The sequence of learning activities.
- The time allotted for tasks.
- The language and presentation of textbooks.
- The examples used in lessons.
- Homework requirements.
- Practical and co-curricular activities.

Curriculum adaptation should be based on the learner's needs and should preserve dignity. The teacher must avoid giving unnecessarily inferior or unrelated work to a child with a disability. Adaptation should promote participation, competence and independence.

5. Creating accessible learning environments

Teachers contribute to accessibility through classroom organisation and resource selection. Accessibility includes physical, communication, instructional, digital and social dimensions.

Teachers can:

- Arrange seating to support visibility, hearing and mobility.
- Maintain clear pathways for wheelchair users and learners with mobility difficulties.
- Reduce unnecessary noise and visual distractions.
- Use large print, high contrast and readable fonts.
- Provide tactile, audio or digital materials where necessary.
- Ensure that videos contain captions or transcripts.

- Read aloud important visual information.
- Use sign language, gestures, symbols or augmentative and alternative communication where required.
- Check whether digital resources are compatible with assistive technologies.

The teacher must also ensure that children with disabilities are included in assemblies, laboratory work, sports, cultural activities, field visits and school celebrations.

6. Using inclusive assessment

Assessment should measure learning rather than disability-related barriers. Teachers should use continuous and varied assessment instead of depending exclusively on written examinations.

Inclusive assessment may involve:

- Oral responses.
- Demonstrations and practical tasks.
- Projects and portfolios.
- Simplified or adapted question papers.
- Extra time.
- Scribes or readers where approved.
- Use of assistive technology.
- Alternative communication modes.
- Frequent formative feedback.
- Assessment in smaller sections.

The RPwD Act specifically refers to modifications in curriculum and examination systems, including extra time and the facility of a scribe or amanuensis where required. Teachers should maintain individual progress records that document participation, strengths, support provided and emerging needs.

7. Working collaboratively with special educators

Inclusive education is a shared responsibility. The regular teacher, special educator, school head, counsellor, therapists and family members should work as a team.

Collaboration may include:

- Joint lesson planning.
- Sharing classroom observations.
- Preparing individualised support plans.
- Developing accessible teaching-learning materials.
- Reviewing learner progress.
- Planning classroom accommodations.

- Consulting on behaviour and communication support.
- Coordinating referrals and follow-up services.

The co-teaching approach is particularly valuable. A general teacher and a special educator can jointly design, deliver and assess instruction for a diverse group of learners. The NCERT research literature also emphasises that teachers need support, advice and preparation to implement inclusive practices effectively.

8. Partnering with parents and the community

Parents possess valuable knowledge about their child's communication, interests, strengths, health, routines and learning preferences. Teachers should establish respectful and regular communication with families.

Effective parent partnership involves:

- Sharing progress instead of contacting parents only when problems occur.
- Listening to parental concerns.
- Explaining classroom expectations clearly.
- Suggesting practical home-learning activities.
- Respecting cultural and linguistic diversity.
- Involving parents in planning reasonable accommodations.
- Connecting families with available government services and support agencies.

In rural and under-resourced areas, teachers may also cooperate with school management committees, local organisations, health workers, panchayats and disability-rights groups.

9. Promoting peer acceptance and social participation

A child may be physically present in a classroom but socially excluded. Teachers must actively build a culture of belonging. Cooperative learning, buddy systems, group projects, inclusive games and peer tutoring can develop empathy and mutual support.

Teachers should not make a child with a disability dependent on one particular peer. Instead, peer support should be organised respectfully and rotated among students. Classroom discussions may address diversity, equality, human dignity and constitutional values without singling out or embarrassing any learner.

Teachers must also respond firmly to bullying, derogatory language and discriminatory behaviour. A safe classroom is essential for both academic learning and psychological well-being.

10. Supporting transition and retention

Teachers play a central role in preventing absenteeism and dropout. They should monitor attendance, participation and changes in performance. When a learner is frequently absent, the teacher should explore barriers such as transport, inaccessible toilets, health conditions, poverty, family responsibilities, bullying or lack of learning support.

Transition support is especially important when learners:

- Move from home to school.
- Shift from primary to upper-primary education.
- Enter secondary school.
- Move between schools.
- Prepare for vocational education or employment.

NEP 2020 emphasises tracking participation and supporting learners who are at risk of dropping out, particularly those from socio-economically disadvantaged groups.

11. Promoting self-advocacy and independence

Inclusive education should empower learners rather than create permanent dependence. Teachers should encourage students with disabilities to express their preferences, make choices, ask for accommodations and participate in decision-making.

Teachers can promote self-advocacy by:

- Asking learners how they prefer to receive instruction.
- Allowing them to choose appropriate ways of demonstrating learning.
- Teaching them how to use assistive devices.
- Encouraging participation in class leadership and school clubs.
- Respecting their right to express disagreement.
- Supporting goal-setting and self-assessment.

This approach is consistent with the rights-based principles of dignity, autonomy, participation and equality recognised in the RPwD Act.

Challenges Faced by Teachers

Despite progressive legislation and policy, teachers face several practical challenges:

- Inadequate pre-service preparation in inclusive education.
- Limited knowledge of specific disabilities and assistive technologies.
- Large class sizes and heavy administrative workload.
- Shortage of special educators and resource persons.
- Insufficient accessible teaching-learning materials.
- Inaccessible buildings, toilets, transport and digital platforms.
- Limited time for individualised planning.
- Examination-oriented teaching practices.
- Social stigma and misconceptions about disability.
- Weak coordination between schools, families, health services and rehabilitation professionals.

- Language diversity and limited materials in Indian and regional languages.

The NCERT study notes that inclusive education is difficult to implement when teachers are insufficiently prepared and supported. It also identifies concerns related to workload, large classes, medical and behavioural needs, resources and coordination among agencies.

These challenges show that teachers should not be held individually responsible for systemic failures. Teacher commitment is necessary, but it must be supported by training, resources, accessible infrastructure, manageable class sizes, leadership and institutional cooperation.

Teacher Preparation and Professional Development

Teacher education programmes should move beyond theoretical descriptions of disability. They should develop practical competence through case studies, classroom observation, micro-teaching, school internships and reflective practice.

Important areas of professional development include:

- Understanding disability from a rights-based and social-model perspective.
- Knowledge of the RPwD Act, 2016 and related policies.
- Universal Design for Learning.
- Differentiated instruction.
- Classroom and behaviour management.
- Early identification of learning difficulties.
- Braille, Indian Sign Language and augmentative communication.
- Assistive and digital technology.
- Curriculum and assessment adaptation.
- Child protection and prevention of bullying.
- Collaboration with parents and special educators.
- Mental health and socio-emotional support.
- Inclusive physical education, arts and vocational education.

NEP 2020 recognises teachers as central to educational reform and emphasises continuous professional development, teacher empowerment and supportive working conditions. Professional development should therefore be continuous, school-based, collaborative and connected with real classroom problems rather than limited to one-time workshops.

Recommendations

To strengthen the role of teachers in inclusive education, the following measures are recommended:

1. **Strengthen teacher education:** Inclusive education should be integrated meaningfully into B.Ed., D.El.Ed. and in-service programmes through practical training.
2. **Provide continuous professional development:** Teachers should receive regular mentoring on differentiated pedagogy, accessibility, assessment and assistive technology.

3. **Appoint adequate special educators:** Schools and school complexes should have access to qualified special educators and resource persons.
4. **Develop accessible materials:** Textbooks, worksheets, digital content and examinations should be available in Braille, audio, large print, sign-supported and accessible digital formats.
5. **Promote collaborative planning:** School leaders should provide time for general teachers, special educators and parents to plan support.
6. **Use school-based assessment:** Teachers should monitor participation, progress and learning outcomes through portfolios, observations and formative assessment.
7. **Ensure accessible infrastructure:** Classroom inclusion must be supported by ramps, accessible toilets, safe transport, appropriate furniture and communication access.
8. **Reduce teacher workload:** Teachers need adequate time and manageable class sizes to provide individualised support.
9. **Build inclusive school culture:** School leadership should establish anti-discrimination policies, grievance mechanisms and student-led inclusion activities.
10. **Recognise teacher efforts:** Inclusive teaching should be included in teacher appraisal, professional recognition and institutional improvement planning.

Conclusion

Teachers are the central practitioners of inclusive education in India. They shape classroom attitudes, identify learning needs, adapt curriculum, use differentiated instruction, organise inclusive assessment, collaborate with families and specialists, and ensure that children with disabilities participate in the academic and social life of the school. The RPwD Act, 2016 and NEP 2020 provide a strong legal and policy framework, but their success depends on the everyday decisions and practices of teachers.indiacode.nic+1

Inclusive education should therefore be understood as a collective institutional responsibility rather than an additional task imposed on individual teachers. A well-prepared, supported and respected teacher can convert inclusion from a policy statement into a lived experience of equality, dignity and belonging. The aim is not merely to place children with disabilities in regular classrooms, but to create classrooms in which every learner is valued, supported and enabled to learn.

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