

Understanding the Multifaceted Dimensions, Socio-psychological Aspects, and Current Practices of Inclusive Education in Nepal: A Comprehensive Analysis

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Abstract: This study offers a comprehensive analysis of the multifaceted dimensions, socio-psychological aspects, and practices of inclusive education in Nepal. Inclusive education aims to provide equitable opportunities for all learners, regardless of their backgrounds, abilities, or disabilities. This study sheds light on the challenges and opportunities in promoting inclusive education in Nepal. Additionally, the socio-psychological aspects of inclusive education, including fostering a sense of belonging, respect for diversity, and social integration, are explored. The analysis is based on a thorough review of existing literature, observations, and informal discussions with educational authorities, teachers, parents, and students, as well as the researcher's personal experiences in the field. The findings of this study contribute to a comprehensive understanding of inclusive education in Nepal and provide insights to inform policy formulation, curriculum development, and effective implementation of inclusive practices. Ultimately, this study underscores the importance of inclusive education in building an inclusive and harmonious society in Nepal.

Keywords: Curriculum Practice, Dimensions, Inclusive Curriculum, Socio-psychological Aspects.

INTRODUCTION

Inclusive education is crucial for providing equal access to education for all students, regardless of their diverse backgrounds, abilities, or disabilities (Armstrong *et al.*, 2021; OECD, 2023). It aims to create inclusive learning environments that enable every learner to fully participate and receive a quality education. In Nepal, implementing inclusive education presents both challenges and opportunities due to the country's cultural diversity and geographical variations (Grimes *et al.*, 2021). Inclusive education encompasses various dimensions, including curriculum adaptations, teacher training, support services, and policy frameworks, which play a crucial role in facilitating inclusive practices and addressing barriers faced by marginalized groups in accessing education (Neupane, 2020; OECD, 2023). Understanding these dimensions is essential for the effective implementation of inclusive education. It goes beyond integrating students with disabilities or special needs into regular classrooms and embraces a broader understanding of diversity, including factors such as ethnicity, language, socioeconomic status, gender, and learning styles (Kart & Kart, 2021; Shahi, 2022; Sharma, 2020). Inclusive education advocates for the acceptance and active involvement of all students in mainstream classrooms, with necessary support and accommodations available when needed (European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, 2022).

Inclusive classrooms not only benefit students with disabilities but also have positive social impacts on students without disabilities. They experience a decrease in fear, hostility, prejudice, and discrimination, while their level of tolerance, acceptance, and understanding increases. Inclusion fosters a more inclusive and empathetic society (Kart &

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Kart, 2021). Inclusive education enhances the learning experiences of all children, promoting understanding, reducing prejudice, and encouraging social integration (UNICEF, 2017). It also equips children with disabilities to actively participate in their communities, contributing both economically and socially (Regmi, 2017). Despite the acknowledged benefits, challenges remain in the practical implementation of inclusive education, particularly in resource-constrained settings (UNICEF, 2017). The concept of inclusive education continues to be the subject of ongoing debates and discussions, with no universally agreed-upon definition (Mendoza & Heymann, 2022).

Researchers play a crucial role in gaining insights into the challenges of inclusive education and developing strategies to address them. Their work can inform inclusive policies, curriculum adaptations, teacher training, and support services (Grimes *et al.*, 2021). Inclusive education promotes social cohesion, national development, and the realization of children's full potential (Neupane, 2020). This article aims to contribute to the existing knowledge on inclusive education, inform policy formulation, curriculum development, and the effective implementation of inclusive practices (Neupane, 2020; Mendoza & Heymann, 2022).

The insights provided in this article have the potential to inform policymakers, educational authorities, and stakeholders involved in education. They can help in developing strategies to address barriers, reduce educational inequalities, and create supportive and inclusive school environments (Grimes *et al.*, 2021; UNESCO, 2021; Wang *et al.*, 2021). By analyzing current practices and considering the local context, evidence-based practices can be implemented to promote inclusive education in Nepal (Koirala & Sharma, 2020). The study aims to foster dialogue, collaboration, and informed decision-making, ultimately advancing inclusive education policies and practices in Nepal for a more inclusive, equitable, and quality education system (Sharma & Deppeler, 2019).

Objectives of the Study

- i. To explore the various dimensions of inclusive education.
- ii. To investigate the socio-psychological aspects related to inclusive education.
- iii. To analyze the current practices of inclusive education in Nepal.

METHODOLOGY

This study is grounded in a comprehensive methodology that includes a desk review, observations, and informal discussions with educational authorities, teachers, parents, and students, as well as the researcher's personal experiences in the field of inclusive education. With a profound understanding acquired through three decades of experience in this field and a meticulous review of relevant literature, this study aims to enrich the existing knowledge on inclusive education and address gaps by offering a comprehensive understanding of the dimensions, socio-psychological aspects, and current practices in Nepal.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Dimensions of Inclusive Education

Inclusive education encompasses multiple dimensions that are essential for creating equitable and accessible learning environments for all students (OECD, 2023). These dimensions address various aspects of inclusive education, including policy frameworks, instructional practices, school culture, and community engagement. Some of the key dimensions of inclusive education are discussed in brief.

Policy and Legislation

Inclusive education requires supportive policy frameworks and legislation that promote equal access, non-discrimination, and the rights of all students to quality education. These policies provide the foundation for inclusive practices in schools (Slee *et al.*, 2022). Policy and legislation play a crucial role in establishing the foundation for inclusive education (UNESCO, 2017). They provide the legal and regulatory framework necessary to ensure equal access, non-discrimination, and the rights of all students to quality education (Cohen, 2021; OECD, 2023). Some key aspects of policy and legislation in the context of inclusive education are stated briefly.

Inclusive Education Policies:

Inclusive education policies set the vision, goals, and principles for inclusive practices in education systems (Slee *et al.*, 2022). They outline the commitment to providing equal opportunities and access to education for all students, including those with disabilities or diverse backgrounds (OECD, 2023; UNESCO, 2017). These policies guide educational institutions in implementing inclusive practices.

Anti-Discrimination and Equal Rights Laws:

Legislation that prohibits discrimination based on disability, race, ethnicity, gender, or other protected characteristics is essential for inclusive education. These laws ensure that students are not excluded or discriminated against in educational settings and that they have the right to equal treatment and opportunities (UNESCO, 2017).

Individualized Education Plans (Ieps) and Accommodations:

Policies and legislation often require the development and implementation of Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) for students with disabilities. These plans outline specific accommodations, modifications, and support services tailored to meet the individual needs of students, ensuring their access to and participation in education (OECD, 2023).

Access and Participation

Inclusive education ensures that all students, including those with disabilities or diverse backgrounds, have equal access to educational opportunities (Konrad *et al.*, 2020). It focuses on removing physical, environmental, and attitudinal barriers to enable full participation in learning activities (UNESCO, 2021). Access and participation are key dimensions of inclusive education that focus on ensuring equal opportunities for all students to access and actively participate in educational activities (OECD, 2023). This dimension addresses physical, environmental, and attitudinal barriers that may hinder students' full engagement in learning. Some overviews of access and participation in inclusive education are discussed below:

Physical Accessibility:

Physical access refers to ensuring that school buildings, classrooms, and facilities are designed and equipped to accommodate the needs of all students, including those with disabilities (OECD, 2023; UNESCO, 2021). This includes features such as ramps, elevators, accessible restrooms, and assistive technologies.

Environmental Accessibility:

Environmental access involves creating inclusive learning environments that are responsive to the diverse needs of students. It includes considerations such as classroom layout, seating arrangements, lighting, acoustics, and sensory supports to create an inclusive and comfortable learning environment for all (OECD, 2023; UNESCO, 2021).

Assistive Technology and Support:

Providing students with disabilities with appropriate assistive technologies and support services is crucial for their access and participation (UNESCO, 2021). This can include tools such as screen readers, text-to-speech software, augmentative and alternative communication devices, and specialized educational supports.

Inclusive Teaching Strategies:

Inclusive teaching strategies involve adapting instructional methods and materials to meet the diverse needs of students (Basham *et al.*, 2020). This can include using multiple modalities, providing clear instructions and explanations, incorporating hands-on activities, and utilizing UDL principles to engage all learners.

It is crucial to recognize that access and participation extend beyond physical considerations to include inclusive practices, equitable opportunities, and fostering a welcoming and supportive learning environment for all students.

Curriculum and Instruction

Curriculum and instruction are fundamental dimensions of inclusive education that focus on designing and delivering educational content in a way that meets the diverse needs of all students (Tomlinson & Moon, 2013). This dimension emphasizes the importance of adapting and personalizing the curriculum to ensure meaningful learning experiences and promote equitable outcomes. In the same way, inclusive education emphasizes the adaptation and flexibility of curriculum and instructional strategies to meet the diverse needs of students. It promotes differentiated instruction, accommodations, and the use of universal design for learning principles to ensure that all learners can engage and succeed (Basham *et al.*, 2020; Tomlinson & Moon, 2013). Some major aspects of curriculum and instruction in inclusive education are stated below:

Differentiated Instruction:

Differentiated instruction involves tailoring teaching methods, materials, and assessments to accommodate the varied learning styles, abilities, and interests of students. It recognizes that students have different strengths and challenges and aims to provide multiple pathways for learning and demonstrating knowledge (Tomlinson & Moon, 2013).

Universal Design for Learning:

It promotes the design of flexible instructional materials and strategies to accommodate the diverse needs of learners (Basham *et al.*, 2020; Rose & Gravel, 2019; Tomlinson & Moon, 2013). Also, it emphasizes providing multiple means of representation, engagement, and expression to support individual student variability.

Accommodations and Modifications:

Inclusive education involves providing accommodations and modifications to ensure that students with disabilities or other learning challenges can access and engage with the curriculum effectively. This may include adjustments in instructional methods, materials, or assessment formats to meet individual needs.

Culturally Responsive Teaching:

Culturally responsive teaching recognizes and values the diverse cultural backgrounds and experiences of students. It incorporates culturally relevant content, perspectives, and teaching approaches to enhance students' engagement and achievement.

Thus, inclusive curriculum and instruction aims to create engaging, accessible, and responsive learning experiences for all students, enabling them to reach their full potential.

School Culture and Climate

Inclusive education fosters a positive and inclusive school culture that values diversity, promotes respect, and celebrates the contributions of all students. It involves creating welcoming and supportive environments where students feel safe, included, and empowered. School culture and climate are critical dimensions of inclusive education as they shape the overall environment and atmosphere within educational institutions (Cohen, 2021). A positive and inclusive school culture and climate promote respect, belonging, and a sense of safety for all students (Thapa *et al.*, 2013). Some of the aspects regarding school culture and climate in the context of inclusive education are stated below:

Respect for Diversity:

An inclusive school culture values and embraces diversity in all its forms, including race, ethnicity, culture, language, gender, sexual orientation, and abilities. It fosters an environment where all students feel respected, accepted, and valued for who they are.

Equity and Inclusion:

Inclusive school cultures prioritize equity and ensure that all students have equal access to resources, opportunities, and support (Booth *et al.*, 2019; OECD, 2023). They actively address and challenge biases, stereotypes, and discrimination, working toward creating a fair and inclusive learning environment.

Positive Relationships:

Building positive relationships among students, teachers, staff, and families is essential for an inclusive school culture. It involves fostering open communication, trust, and collaboration to create a sense of belonging and support for all members of the school community.

Safe and Supportive Environment:

Inclusive schools prioritize creating a safe and supportive environment where students feel physically and emotionally safe. They establish clear behavioral expectations, implement anti-bullying measures, and provide appropriate support systems to address the social and emotional well-being of students.

Thus, nurturing and inclusive school culture and climate are crucial for creating an environment where all students can thrive, feel valued, and actively participate in their educational journey.

Collaboration and Partnerships

Collaboration and partnerships are vital dimensions of inclusive education that emphasize the importance of working together among educators, families, community members, and other stakeholders to support the diverse needs of students (Friend & Cook, 2020). These collaborations foster a network of support, expertise sharing, and collective responsibility for inclusive practices (Pomerantz, 2019). Similarly, inclusive education recognizes the importance of collaboration among educators, families, and community stakeholders. It involves building partnerships to support students' diverse needs, share expertise, and create a network of support for inclusive practices (Slee *et al.*, 2022). Some major aspects regarding collaboration and partnerships in inclusive education are stated briefly.

Inter-professional Collaboration:

Inter-professional collaboration involves professionals from different disciplines, such as teachers, special educators, therapists, counselors, and administrators, working together to address the diverse needs of students. This collaboration enables the sharing of knowledge, expertise, and resources to provide comprehensive and coordinated support.

Family Engagement:

Inclusive education recognizes the critical role of families as partners in the educational process (Friend & Cook, 2020). It involves actively involving families in decision-making, goal-setting, and problem-solving related to their child's education. Family engagement promotes a strong home-school connection and enhances student outcomes.

Community Partnerships:

Collaborating with community organizations, agencies, and service providers can greatly enhance inclusive education efforts (Friend & Cook, 2020). These partnerships can offer additional resources, expertise, and support to address the broader needs of students and their families within the community.

Professional Learning Communities:

Professional learning communities provide opportunities for educators to collaborate, reflect, and learn from one another. It focuses on sharing best practices, analyzing student data, and collectively problem-solving to improve instructional practices and enhance student learning outcomes.

Thus, collaboration and partnerships are essential for creating a comprehensive support system that addresses the diverse needs of students, promotes inclusive practices, and fosters a sense of shared responsibility for student success.

Socio-Psychological Aspects

Socio-psychological aspects in inclusive education encompass the social and emotional factors that impact students' well-being, sense of belonging, and overall development (Brackett & Rivers, 2020). It recognizes the importance of creating a supportive and inclusive environment that addresses students' social interactions, self-esteem, self-efficacy, and emotional well-being ((Armstrong *et al.*, 2021; Swick & Jellinek, 2021). Overviews of socio-psychological aspects of inclusive education are discussed briefly.

Social Inclusion:

Social inclusion refers to creating an environment where all students feel accepted, valued, and included. It involves fostering positive peer relationships, promoting empathy and understanding, and providing opportunities for collaboration and social interaction among students of diverse backgrounds (Booth *et al.*, 2019; Bunist *et al.*, 2022).

Emotional Well-Being:

Inclusive education recognizes the significance of supporting students' emotional well-being. It involves creating a safe and nurturing environment, promoting emotional regulation and resilience, and providing appropriate support and interventions to address emotional challenges.

Self-Esteem and Self-Efficacy:

Inclusive education aims to foster positive self-esteem and self-efficacy in students. It involves nurturing a sense of competence, promoting positive self-perceptions, and providing opportunities for students to develop and demonstrate their skills and abilities.

Positive Behavior Supports:

Positive behavior supports focus on promoting positive behaviors and preventing challenging behaviors in inclusive settings. It involves teaching social skills, providing clear expectations and routines, and using proactive strategies to reinforce positive behavior.

Thus, it is essential to address socio-psychological aspects of inclusive education is crucial for creating a supportive and inclusive learning environment that promotes students' overall well-being, positive social interactions, and emotional growth.

Inclusive Education: Current Practices in Nepal

This section provides an overview of the current practices of inclusive education in Nepal. It examines the policies, initiatives, and programs that have been implemented to promote inclusive education (Slee *et al.*, 2022). Inclusive education in Nepal refers to the ongoing efforts to provide equitable and quality education for all students,

including those with disabilities and diverse learning needs. Here's an overview of inclusive education practices in Nepal, focusing on principles, perspectives, dimensions, and socio-psychological aspects. Additionally, it highlights successful strategies, innovative approaches, and noteworthy projects that have positively impacted inclusive education practices in Nepal.

Inclusive education in Nepal is guided by several principles that aim to create an equitable and accessible learning environment for all students. The principle of equity ensures that all students, regardless of their abilities or backgrounds, have equal opportunities to access and benefit from education (Asian Development Bank, 2020; OECD, 2023). Non-discrimination is another key principle, aiming to eliminate barriers and biases that may hinder the participation and learning of students with disabilities or other marginalized groups. Inclusive education also emphasizes participation and collaboration among students, teachers, families, and community members to create an inclusive learning environment (Armstrong *et al.*, 2021). Individualized support is provided to accommodate the diverse needs of students, considering their learning styles, strengths, and challenges (Grimes *et al.*, 2021).

The principles of inclusive education in Nepal are influenced by a rights-based approach, aligning with international conventions such as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD). This approach ensures the right to education for all students. Inclusive education practices in Nepal also take into consideration the cultural and contextual realities of the country, integrating local knowledge, values, and practices into educational approaches. Collaboration and partnerships among government bodies, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), schools, and community stakeholders are emphasized to promote inclusive practices. However, there are various barriers to the effective implementation of inclusive education, such as resistance to change, a lack of teacher training, large class sizes, inadequate funding and resources, negative attitudes, and insufficient teacher support (Armstrong *et al.*, 2021; European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, 2020; Sharma, 2020).

Inclusive education in Nepal encompasses several dimensions and strategies. The UDL principles are applied to design inclusive curricula, instructional materials, and teaching strategies that meet the diverse learning needs of all students. Special education needs support services, such as assistive technology, individualized education plans, and teacher training, are incorporated to address the specific needs of students with disabilities (Grimes *et al.*, 2021). Teacher professional development programs focus on enhancing teachers' knowledge and skills in inclusive pedagogy, differentiated instruction, and classroom management (Florian *et al.*, 2019; Sharma, 2020).

Socio-psychological aspects of inclusive education in Nepal include fostering social inclusion and acceptance among students, promoting positive peer relationships, empathy, and understanding. The emotional well-being and mental health of students are also recognized as important, with counseling services, peer support, and the creation of a safe and supportive school environment. Efforts are being made in Nepal to create physically accessible and inclusive school infrastructure, including ramps, accessible toilets, and assistive devices. The development and implementation of inclusive curricula and instructional practices are promoted to cater to the diverse needs of students (Grimes *et al.*, 2021). Nepal adopts a community-based approach to inclusive education, recognizing the role of the community in supporting children with disabilities. A comprehensive policy framework, such as the National Inclusive Education Policy, guides inclusive education practices, while training and capacity-building initiatives equip education professionals with the necessary knowledge and skills (Slee *et al.*, 2022). Monitoring and evaluation mechanisms are in place to track progress and inform policy decisions (Nolan *et al.*, 2021).

Inclusive education in Nepal also focuses on inclusive early childhood education, addressing the educational needs of marginalized communities, conducting research, and fostering collaboration among academic institutions, NGOs, and international organizations. Ongoing efforts in Nepal reflect a commitment to inclusive education and the promotion of equal opportunities, accessibility, and quality education for all students, including those with disabilities and diverse learning needs. Inclusive Education Resource Centers (IERCs) provide support and resources, while peer support programs and student leadership initiatives foster positive relationships and empowerment. Efforts to provide early intervention services and specialized support in early childhood education contribute to a strong foundation for inclusive education. Targeted support programs and scholarships are implemented to address the educational needs of marginalized communities. Research and collaboration support the improvement of inclusive education practices in Nepal.

Inclusive education practices in Nepal have made significant strides in recent years, driven by the implementation of inclusive education policies. These policies encompass various aspects, including accessible infrastructure, curriculum adaptation, teacher training, and support services for students with disabilities (Nepal Ministry of Education, 2020; Sharma, 2020). To support inclusive education, Inclusive Education Resource Centers (IERCs) play a vital role by providing training, resources, and assistive devices to teachers, parents, and students (UNESCO, 2020).

Nepal places a strong emphasis on teacher professional development to enhance educators' capacity in inclusive pedagogy (Sharma, 2020). Training programs focus on inclusive teaching strategies, classroom management techniques, and the use of assistive technologies (Florian *et al.*, 2019). Collaboration and partnerships among government agencies, NGOs, and community stakeholders are emphasized to effectively implement inclusive education policies, share resources and expertise, and promote community involvement (Shahi, 2022).

The development of inclusive curricula and assessments is a priority for Nepal, aiming to cater to the diverse learning needs of students. This involves adapting teaching materials, incorporating local context and culture, and employing diverse assessment methods (Chalise, 2021). Inclusive education practices in Nepal extend to marginalized groups, such as girls, children from ethnic minorities, and those from disadvantaged socioeconomic backgrounds. Efforts are made to ensure their access to quality education, eliminate enrollment and retention barriers, and provide targeted support programs (Grimes *et al.*, 2021).

Nepal is exploring the use of assistive technologies, including screen readers, text-to-speech software, and alternative input devices, to support inclusive education. Pilot projects and initiatives are underway to assess the effectiveness and impact of these technologies in enhancing the learning outcomes of students with disabilities (Grimes *et al.*, 2021). While inclusive education has made significant progress in Nepal, there are still challenges that need to be addressed. Limited resources, including funding, specialized support services, and trained professionals, pose obstacles to the effective implementation of inclusive education practices (Chalise, 2021). Attitudinal barriers and social stigma surrounding disabilities also need to be addressed to create a more inclusive and accepting society (UNESCO, 2020). Additionally, the geographical terrain and remote locations in Nepal present challenges in terms of access to education for all students, especially those in rural and marginalized communities (Grimes *et al.*, 2021).

In conclusion, inclusive education in Nepal is guided by principles of equity, non-discrimination, participation, and collaboration. It aims to provide equal opportunities and quality education for all students, including those with disabilities and diverse learning needs (OECD, 2023). It seeks to reform the education system to ensure it meets the diverse needs of all learners and helps them develop their full potential through equal access within mainstream classrooms (OECD, 2023; UNESCO, 2021). Efforts are being made to develop inclusive curricula, improve teacher training, create accessible infrastructure, and provide support services. Despite challenges, Nepal is committed to advancing inclusive education and ensuring the rights and well-being of all students.

CONCLUSION

The comprehensive analysis of inclusive education in Nepal aims to drive positive change in the education system, making it more inclusive, equitable, and responsive to the diverse needs of learners (Asian Development Bank, 2020). By addressing the challenges and opportunities within the realm of inclusive education, this research seeks to contribute to the realization of inclusive education as a fundamental right for all individuals in Nepal. The study underscores the significance of inclusive education in ensuring equitable access to quality education for learners from diverse backgrounds and abilities (OECD, 2023). It emphasizes the creation of inclusive learning environments that foster a sense of belonging, respect for diversity, and social integration among students, promoting positive outcomes and well-being.

Through an examination of various dimensions, including curriculum adaptations, teacher training, support services, and policy frameworks, the analysis sheds light on the essential components necessary for implementing inclusive practices and addressing the barriers faced by marginalized groups in accessing education (Nolan *et al.*, 2021). Furthermore, the study recognizes the importance of socio-psychological aspects in fostering inclusive school environments. By promoting positive self-identity, acceptance, and social cohesion, inclusive education nurtures an atmosphere that supports the holistic development of learners and encourages their academic success.

The findings of this analysis contribute to the existing knowledge on inclusive education in Nepal and offer valuable insights for policymakers, educators, parents, and students. These insights can inform the formulation of inclusive education policies, the development of relevant curricula, and the effective implementation of inclusive practices. By identifying successful strategies and innovative approaches, the study provides potential pathways for promoting inclusive education throughout the country. Ultimately, the goal of this analysis is to create an inclusive and harmonious society in Nepal, where every individual has equal access to quality education. The comprehensive understanding gained through this research will facilitate collaboration and informed decision-making among stakeholders, ensuring that inclusive education becomes a reality for all learners in Nepal.

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