

# CONFLUX

## JOURNAL OF EDUCATION

ISSN 2320-9305 (PRINT) ISSN 2347-5706 (ONLINE)

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A PEER REVIEWED JOURNAL PUBLISHED SINCE 2013

VOLUME 12

ISSUE 2

JUNE 2024

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[cjoe.naspublishers.com](http://cjoe.naspublishers.com)

## INDEX

Sl.	Title	Page
<b>1</b>	<b>Integration of ICT in Teacher Training Institutions: A Transformation in the Paradigm of Teacher Education</b> Aamir Majeed and Prof. Syedah Fawzia Nadeem	<b>6-15</b>
<b>2</b>	<b>Awareness on Utilization of Community Resources in Teaching Chemistry at Secondary School Level</b> A.Devi and Dr.T.Kanakaraj	<b>16-24</b>
<b>3</b>	<b>Teachers Professional Development and Job Satisfaction</b> Ashish Kumar	<b>25-30</b>
<b>4</b>	<b>Teacher’s Professional Development in Online Social Networking Sites</b> Cathrine Asha S. and Dr. Blessing Mary	<b>31-39</b>
<b>5</b>	<b>Life Style and Attitude towards Sustainable Development Goals among Prospective Teachers at Secondary Level</b> Sreevidya R. and Dr. Mubi K. Mohamed Ali	<b>40-57</b>
<b>6</b>	<b>Socio-emotional Skills among Secondary School Students of Standard Nine in terms of Gender and Demographic Location of Udupi District</b> Rose Kiran Pinto	<b>58-71</b>
<b>7</b>	<b>Blended Learning: A Vision for the Future</b> Dr. Fatma Gausiya	<b>72-87</b>
<b>8</b>	<b>A Study on Perception of Student Teachers on Professional Development</b> Dr. Manju N.D	<b>88-103</b>
<b>9</b>	<b>Emerging Need of Blended Learning</b> Dr. Pratibha Khare	<b>104-115</b>

<b>11</b>	<b>Role of Fourth Industrial Revolution and Education 4.0 on Sustainable Development in Education</b> Dr. Seema Gopinath	<b>116-124</b>
<b>12</b>	<b>Efficacy of Indigenous Rhymes in Developing Student Engagement and Motivation</b> Dr. Prithi Venkatesh, Ms. Sreevidya MS, Ms. Nisha A, Mr .Srinivasa R	<b>125-139</b>
<b>13</b>	<b>Transforming Education: Evaluating The Implementation and Effects of the 2020 Education Policy</b> Dr. Veena Khilnani	<b>140-146</b>
<b>14</b>	<b>Educational Significance of Inclusion in Reducing Juvenile Delinquency-Need for Multi-dimensional Approach</b> Dr.C.B.Vikram	<b>147-165</b>
<b>15</b>	<b>From Exclusion to Excellence: Overcoming Obstacles to Inclusion in Schools</b> Dr. Rajeshwari Garg	<b>166-176</b>
<b>16</b>	<b>Impact of Artificial Intelligence Enabled Technological Pedagogical Implications in Higher Education</b> Dr.S.Ammami, Dr.M.Anita, Ananya	<b>177-186</b>
<b>17</b>	<b>The Effect of Artificial Intelligence on Research Methodology</b> Dr. Taiyaba Nazli	<b>187-194</b>
<b>18</b>	<b>Empowering Educators: Navigating Continuous Professional Development In Alignment With NEP 2020 In India.</b> Jagirdar Lubna Batool and Dr. Syed Azaz Ali	<b>195-206</b>
<b>19</b>	<b>Inevitability of Assessment and Feedback Strategies in the Teaching- Learning Continuum</b> Jasmine. J	<b>207-214</b>
<b>20</b>	<b>Vital Role of Teachers, Parents and Students as a Joint Venture in Inclusive Education</b> Mrs. Jyothi H.D.	<b>215-221</b>

21	<b>Humour as an Effective Teaching Strategy</b> Madan Kumar	222-229
22	<b>Significance of Inclusive Education in Fostering Social Justice in India</b> Mamta and Nivedita	230-243
23	<b>An Investigation of the Gender Disparity in the Teaching Abilities of Trainee Teachers</b> Mrs. Mirza Humaira Batul	244-256
24	<b>Enhancing Learning of Students through Formative Feedback in Higher Education</b> Monal	257-267
25	<b>Exploring the Preparedness for LMS among Teacher Educators and B.Ed. Students in the Current Education Scenario</b> Dr.M.Ponnambaleswari and Aswathy C.K.	268-281
26	<b>The Family Environment Promotes Student Engagement and Motivation</b> N. Revathy and Dr. A. Blessing Mary	282-285
27	<b>Transformative Education Reforms: Catalyzing Social Justice in India</b> Pooja and Nivedita	286-294
28	<b>Exploring Participatory Pedagogy for Cultivating Inclusivity in Classroom</b> Prabhleen Saini	295-307
29	<b>Transforming Education: A Journey Towards Transgender Inclusion</b> Prakasha C.	308-320
30	<b>Impact of Competency Based Education on Learning Outcomes</b> Prashasti Singh and Dr. Kalpana Thakur	321-333

<b>31</b>	<b>An Introduction of Inclusive Education</b> Rajesh Kumar Pathak	<b>334-343</b>
<b>32</b>	<b>E- learning: Impact on Psychosocial Competence</b> Ms. Rajwinder Kaur and Dr. Gagandeep Kaur	<b>344-353</b>
<b>33</b>	<b>Computer-Based Programmes to Improve Communication with Children with Special Needs: Cerebral Palsy</b> Ramesh	<b>354-363</b>
<b>34</b>	<b>Nurturing Students Engagement: An Educator’s Role in Fostering Autonomy, Competence, and Relatedness in Teaching-Learning Process</b> Saroj Rani	<b>364-388</b>
<b>35</b>	<b>Life Style and Attitude towards Sustainable Development Goals among Prospective Teachers at Secondary Level</b> Sreevidya R. and Dr. Mubi K. Mohamed Ali	<b>389-405</b>
<b>36</b>	<b>Perception of Pre-service Teachers towards Blended Learning in Teaching-learning Process</b> Ghazala Parveen	<b>406-429</b>

## **Significance of Inclusive Education in Fostering Social Justice in India**

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### **Abstract**

Inclusive education, characterized by its acknowledgment and accommodation of diverse learner needs, is pivotal in shaping equitable learning environments. Simultaneously, social justice, entailing fair resource distribution and opportunities, stands as a foundational pillar for societal equity. This paper explores the convergence of inclusive education and social justice in the Indian context, outlining their individual significance and collective impact on societal transformation. The paper elucidates the centrality of education in societal progression, delineating its role in empowering individuals, driving economic growth, fostering social cohesion, and nurturing responsible citizenship. It reflects on historical education paradigms in India, traversing ancient traditions, medieval influences, colonial imprints, and post-independence reforms, underscoring the persistent pursuit of equitable education for all. Highlighting the legislative strides in India, such as the Right to Education Act, the Persons with Disabilities Act, and the National Education Policy 2020, the paper showcases the evolution toward inclusive education. Despite these advancements, challenges in implementation persist due to resource limitations, infrastructural gaps, and attitudinal barriers. The paper asserts the profound impact of inclusive education on fostering social justice in India. It elucidates how inclusive education dismantles historical barriers for marginalized groups, fosters economic

development, nurtures social cohesion, and transforms societal mindsets. It underscores the significance of inclusive education in empowering marginalized communities, reducing social inequalities, and shaping a more inclusive, participatory society. In conclusion, the paper emphasizes inclusive education as an indispensable tool in advancing social justice. It champions equity, dismantles systemic disparities, and lays the groundwork for an equitable society where every individual, regardless of background or ability, can flourish. Inclusive education, aligned with legislative frameworks, serves as a beacon for a future steeped in fairness, inclusion, and respect for all.

## **Introduction**

### **Inclusive Education**

Inclusive education is an approach to teaching and learning that acknowledges, accommodates, and values the diverse needs of all learners. It involves creating a learning environment where students of all abilities, backgrounds, identities, and circumstances are welcomed, supported, and provided with equitable access to quality education. Inclusive education aims to remove barriers to learning and participation while embracing diversity and promoting the full involvement of all learners in the educational process.

### **Social Justice**

Social justice refers to the fair and equitable distribution of resources, opportunities, and privileges within a society. It involves the pursuit of equality, rights, and fairness for all individuals, irrespective of their socioeconomic status, race, gender, ethnicity, religion, or other characteristics. Social justice seeks to address systemic inequalities, discrimination, and

injustices by advocating for policies, practices, and societal norms that ensure everyone has access to fundamental rights, opportunities, and a dignified life. It aims to create a society where all members can fully participate and benefit on an equal footing.

### **Significance of Education in Societal Transformation**

Education stands as a cornerstone in societal transformation, holding immense significance due to its far-reaching impact on individuals and communities. Education serves as a catalyst for societal transformation by empowering individuals, fostering economic growth, promoting social cohesion, nurturing responsible citizenship, driving innovation, and contributing to sustainable development. It is a fundamental tool in creating more equitable, prosperous, and inclusive societies. Following are some key points highlighting its significance:

1. **Empowerment and Individual Development: Knowledge and Skills:** Education equips individuals with knowledge, skills, and competencies necessary for personal and professional growth. It empowers them to make informed decisions, fostering critical thinking, problem-solving, and creativity.
2. **Self-Realization:** Through education, individuals discover their talents, interests, and potential, enabling them to set goals and pursue their aspirations, leading to a sense of fulfillment and purpose.
3. **Societal Progress and Economic Development: Human Capital:** Education builds human capital, contributing to a skilled and productive workforce essential for economic growth and innovation.

4. **Poverty Alleviation:** It serves as a pathway out of poverty by opening doors to employment opportunities and economic mobility.
5. **Social Cohesion and Equity: Promoting Tolerance and Understanding:** Education fosters tolerance, empathy, and understanding among diverse groups, breaking down prejudices, stereotypes, and promoting social harmony.
6. **Reducing Inequality:** It acts as a tool to reduce social disparities by providing equal access to opportunities and resources, addressing systemic inequalities.
7. **Civic Engagement and Democracy: Informed Citizenship:** Education cultivates active and informed citizens capable of participating in democratic processes, advocating for their rights, and engaging in civic responsibilities.
8. **Social Responsibility:** It instills values of social responsibility, ethical behavior, and respect for human rights, contributing to a more just and accountable society.
9. **Innovation and Global Competitiveness: Research and Innovation:** Education fuels research, innovation, and technological advancements, positioning societies at the forefront of global competitiveness.
10. **Adaptability to Change:** It prepares individuals to adapt to evolving societal, economic, and technological changes, fostering resilience and agility.
11. **Sustainable Development: Environmental Consciousness:** Education promotes environmental awareness and sustainability practices, fostering a generation that values and protects the environment.

## **Historical Context of Education and Social Justice in India**

Here a brief historical context is given to illustrate the evolution of education in India, from ancient traditions to colonial influence and post-independence reforms, with a persistent focus on addressing social justice through equitable education for all.

### **Ancient Period:**

**Gurukul System:** Education was primarily imparted through the Gurukul system, where students lived with teachers (gurus) in ashrams, receiving holistic education covering various subjects, including ethics, sciences, and philosophy.

**Caste-Based Education:** Education was often limited to specific castes or social groups, with disparities in access and opportunities.

### **Medieval Period:**

**Madrasas and Educational Centers:** Islamic rule introduced madrasas and centers of learning, contributing to the spread of knowledge in fields like mathematics, medicine, and literature.

**Caste and Gender Barriers:** Education continued to be limited by caste and gender, with marginalized groups facing exclusion from formal learning opportunities.

### **Colonial Era:**

**British Education Policies:** The British introduced modern education systems, focusing on English-language education and institutions based on the British model.

Macaulay's Minute: Thomas Macaulay's Minute on Education in 1835 emphasized English education, which became a tool for employment and access to colonial administration but perpetuated disparities.

### **Independence Movement and Post-Independence:**

Nationalist Efforts: During the independence movement, education was seen as a tool for social reform and national awakening. Leaders like Gandhi emphasized basic education for all.

Constitutional Provisions: Post-independence, India's Constitution (1950) emphasized the importance of education as a fundamental right and directive principles for creating an equitable education system.

Education Reforms: Various policies aimed at promoting education for all, such as the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (Education for All) and the Right to Education Act (2009), sought to address disparities and improve access.

### **Challenges and Progress:**

Caste and Socioeconomic Disparities: Despite efforts, socio-economic disparities, caste-based discrimination, gender inequality, and regional disparities remain challenges in providing equitable education.

Technology and Access: Advancements in technology have opened new avenues for education, but the digital divide poses challenges in ensuring equal access for all.

### **Current Scenario:**

Continued Reforms: Ongoing efforts focus on inclusive education, skill development, and

addressing quality and infrastructure gaps in schools and higher education institutions.

**Social Justice Movements:** Movements advocating for social justice continue to highlight the importance of education in addressing systemic inequalities and promoting inclusive learning environments.

### **Importance of Inclusive Education in Fostering Social Justice in India**

Inclusive education plays a pivotal role in fostering social justice in India by addressing systemic inequalities and ensuring equitable opportunities for all individuals regardless of their background, abilities, or identities. Here are some key points highlighting its significance:

**Addressing marginalization:** Inclusive education aims to dismantle barriers that marginalize certain groups, such as individuals with disabilities, lower castes, minorities, and girls. By providing access to quality education for all, regardless of social status or identity, it combats historical injustices and promotes a more inclusive society.

**Empowerment and equity:** Education is a powerful tool for empowerment. Inclusive education ensures that every individual, irrespective of their background, receives an education tailored to their needs. This empowerment cultivates a sense of agency, self-worth, and capability, fostering a more equitable society.

**Building social cohesion:** By bringing together students from diverse backgrounds in the same educational setting, inclusive education nurtures understanding, empathy, and respect for differences. This creates a foundation for social cohesion, breaking down stereotypes, prejudices, and fostering a more inclusive and harmonious society.

**Economic development:** Inclusive education contributes to economic growth by tapping

into the full potential of all individuals. When marginalized groups are provided with education and skills training, it leads to a more skilled and diverse workforce, driving economic progress and reducing poverty.

**Legal and ethical imperatives:** Legislation such as the Right to Education Act in India emphasizes the right of every child to receive free and compulsory education. Inclusive education aligns with these legal imperatives, ensuring that educational institutions uphold ethical standards by providing fair and inclusive learning environments.

**Long-term social impact:** Investing in inclusive education yields long-term social benefits. It breaks the cycle of poverty, reduces social disparities, and fosters a more inclusive, tolerant, and participatory society where everyone has the opportunity to contribute and thrive.

**Transforming mindsets:** Inclusive education challenges societal norms and perceptions about ability, gender, caste, and other identities. It promotes a shift towards more inclusive mindsets, fostering acceptance, and celebrating diversity rather than perpetuating exclusion and discrimination.

Inclusive education in India serves as a catalyst for social justice by providing equitable opportunities, fostering empowerment, nurturing diversity, and breaking down societal barriers. It stands as a fundamental pillar in the pursuit of a fair, inclusive, and just society where every individual has the chance to reach their full potential.

### **Legislative Advancements toward Inclusive Education in India**

India has made significant legislative advancements toward inclusive education to ensure equitable access to quality education for all individuals, regardless of their backgrounds or

abilities. Some key legislative measures include:

**Right to Education (RTE) Act, 2009:**

**Universal Access:** The RTE Act made education a fundamental right for children aged 6 to 14, mandating free and compulsory education.

**Inclusive Provisions:** It emphasized inclusive education by prohibiting discrimination, ensuring admission of children from marginalized groups, and promoting the inclusion of children with disabilities in mainstream schools.

**Persons with Disabilities (Equal Opportunities, Protection of Rights and Full Participation) Act, 1995:**

**Empowering Individuals with Disabilities:** This act aimed to empower individuals with disabilities by ensuring equal opportunities, protection of rights, and full participation in society.

**Inclusive Education:** It advocated for inclusive education and provisions for special schools, aids, and resources for students with disabilities.

**National Education Policy (NEP) 2020:**

**Focus on Inclusion:** The NEP 2020 highlights the importance of inclusive education, aiming to ensure the inclusion of all children in schools regardless of social or economic backgrounds.

**Flexible Learning:** It emphasizes flexible approaches to learning, catering to diverse needs and promoting the use of technology to facilitate inclusive education practices.

## **Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA)**

Universal Elementary Education: SSA, a government program, aims to provide universal access to elementary education.

Inclusive Strategies: It focuses on inclusive strategies, teacher training for handling diverse needs, and improving infrastructure for schools to accommodate all children.

Various educational acts have undergone amendments to align with inclusive education principles, ensuring that educational institutions create an inclusive environment and accommodate diverse learning needs. Efforts have been made for accessibility and initiatives have been undertaken to integrate technology for inclusive education, making educational content accessible to diverse learners. Also efforts were made for programs for teacher training and capacity building emphasize inclusive pedagogies and strategies to cater to diverse learning needs. While these legislative measures and initiatives mark significant strides towards inclusive education in India, challenges persist in implementation due to resource constraints, attitudinal barriers, infrastructure gaps, and the need for continual policy refinement to address emerging needs. Efforts are ongoing to bridge these gaps and ensure effective implementation of inclusive education practices across the country.

### **Impact of Inclusive Education on Social Justice in India**

The impact of inclusive education on social justice in India is multifaceted, influencing various aspects of society and fostering a more equitable and inclusive environment. Further, the impact of inclusive education on social justice in India is profound, reaching beyond educational realms to shape attitudes, reduce inequalities, foster social cohesion, empower marginalized

groups, and lay the groundwork for a more equitable and inclusive society. **Empowerment of Marginalized Groups:** Inclusive education ensures that marginalized groups, including those with disabilities, from lower castes, minorities, and girls, have equal access to education. This empowerment through education breaks barriers and fosters a sense of agency among these groups.

**Reduction of Social Inequalities:** Inclusive education breaks down systemic barriers that perpetuate social inequalities by providing equal opportunities for learning and growth, irrespective of socioeconomic status, gender, or caste. It addresses discriminatory practices by fostering a culture of acceptance, respect, and understanding among students from diverse backgrounds.

**Building an Inclusive Society:** Inclusive education nurtures an understanding and appreciation of diversity, encouraging empathy and reducing prejudices and biases. It creates a conducive environment for social interaction and cooperation among students from different backgrounds, promoting social harmony and cohesion.

**Economic and Societal Impact:** Inclusive education leads to better economic participation and opportunities for marginalized groups, reducing the cycle of poverty and contributing to economic growth. Educating marginalized groups empowers entire communities, leading to more informed decision-making, improved health outcomes, and increased civic engagement.

**Transformative Effect on Attitudes:** Inclusive education challenges societal norms and attitudes toward diversity, fostering more inclusive mindsets that value and celebrate differences. It contributes to a cultural transformation by promoting respect for human rights, social justice,

and equality.

**Long-term Social Benefits:** Inclusive education lays the foundation for a more sustainable and equitable society by ensuring that every individual can contribute to their fullest potential. It significantly reduces exclusion and marginalization, creating a more just and participatory society where everyone has the opportunity to thrive.

**Policy and Institutional Impact:** The emphasis on inclusive education has led to policy changes and reforms that prioritize equitable access to education and the removal of barriers hindering social justice. Educational institutions adopting inclusive practices contribute to creating environments that promote diversity, equity, and inclusion.

### **Summary and Conclusion**

The critical role of inclusive education in advancing social justice in India cannot be overstated. It stands as a fundamental tool for fostering a society that values equity, inclusion, and fairness. Inclusive education ensures that every individual, regardless of their background, abilities, or circumstances, has the right to access quality education. It dismantles barriers that historically marginalized groups have faced, providing them with equal opportunities for learning and growth. By actively addressing systemic inequalities in education, inclusive practices work towards leveling the playing field. It strives to eliminate discrimination based on caste, gender, socioeconomic status, ability, or other factors, promoting fairness and justice in educational opportunities. Inclusive education fosters an environment where diversity is celebrated, fostering understanding, empathy, and respect among students from different backgrounds. This paves the way for social cohesion, breaking down stereotypes, prejudices, and

fostering a sense of belonging for all. It leads to economic growth, increased productivity, and reduced social disparities by empowering marginalized communities through education.

Inclusive education aligns with policy frameworks and legislative measures, emphasizing the importance of equity and inclusion in education. It sets the stage for a long-term vision of a society where every individual's rights and potential are respected and realized. Inclusive education serves as a cornerstone in the advancement of social justice in India. It not only provides access to education but also lays the foundation for a more equitable, inclusive, and just society where diversity is embraced, and every individual has the opportunity to thrive and contribute meaningfully. Its impact extends far beyond the classroom, shaping a future that values and upholds the principles of fairness, equity, and respect for all.

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