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## Attitudes of Children with Special Needs toward Model Inclusive Schools: A Study in Delhi

**Tarana Anjum**

Research Scholar, Department of Teacher Training & Non-formal Education (IASE), Faculty of  
Education, Jamia Millia Islamia, New Delhi, Email Id: tarana0501@gmail.com

**Dr. Saurabh Ray**

Assistant Professor Special Education (Visual Impairment), Department of Teacher Training & Non-  
formal Education (IASE), Faculty of Education, Jamia Millia Islamia, New Delhi, sray@jmi.ac.in

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### ABSTRACT

Inclusive education is an effort to provide equal educational opportunities to children, along with children with special needs (CWSN), in mainstream schools. In this Indian context, inclusive schooling is expected to provide support to diversity in relation to pedagogy, infrastructure, and emotional support. The current study examines how children with special needs perceive model inclusive schooling in Delhi by adopting a mixed methodology. A structured self-developed perception scale, semi-structured interviews, and focus group discussions were utilized to collect data from 80 children with special needs enrolled in model inclusive schooling in Delhi. The findings generated from quantitative methodology reveal that children have ambivalent perceptions in relation to acceptance from peers and support from teachers in some aspects. However, in relation to academic support, infrastructure, emotional well-being, exclusion, and worries, children were dissatisfied. The findings are supplemented with further exploring worries, exclusion, and inequality in providing support in positive aspects of care and support. The argument is made that model inclusive schooling in Delhi is yet to make some progress



## **Introduction**

Inclusive Education is based on the principle that all children, disabled or non-disabled alike, should have access to quality education. Inclusive Education promotes participation, equity, dignity, and diversity. Children with Special Needs (CWSN) may encounter several barriers to efficient education. These barriers may be due to the inadequacy of the infrastructure of the institution. In other words, it may be due to the lack of accessibility.

In India, the concept of inclusive education is gaining momentum through legal and policy support, such as the Right to Education Act (2009), Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act (2016), and the Samagra Shiksha initiative, which requires regular schools to accommodate CWSN students and offer support services to them. The idea behind inclusive schools is to create spaces where diversity is not marginalized but embraced and accommodated.

However, one cannot measure the inclusion process just by the execution of policies and infrastructural development. Inclusion can actually be tested by the daily experiences of children—their sense of safety, acceptance, support, and belief in school. Despite all this, the voice of CWSN has not received due representation in the study. This study tries to fill the gap by understanding the perception of CWSN on inclusive schools

## **Concept of Inclusive Education**

Inclusive education involves redesigning schools to meet the needs of all learners. UNESCO (1994) strongly reiterated the effectiveness and efficiency of inclusive schools to eliminate disparity and build an inclusive society. Inclusion encompasses access and involvement and not mere presence.

## **Student Perception & School Experience**

It is illustrated in research that student perceptions are valuable insights into the school environment. It has been proven that even though CWSN may feel socially included, it is likely that they suffer academically from insufficient adaptations and assessment. Emotional well-being is another important area in the exclusion-inclusion continuum that is often overlooked.



## **Inclusive Education in India-Rationale**

The Indian studies have primarily concentrated on teacher attitudes, infrastructure issues, and policy implementation. Many scholars have also reported discrepancies in inclusive education policy and its implementation in the class. Very few attempts have been made to study inclusion in terms of CWSN themselves, especially in urban zones such as Delhi.

### **Model inclusive school**

The model of inclusive schools created in the Samagra Shiksha in Delhi initiative is focused on creating a comprehensive educational environment that is all-inclusive for all types of disabilities. These 30 schools are created as a prototype for other educational institutions within the cluster. These schools include all types of children with disabilities and provide them with essential services.

### **Need and Significance of the Study**

Inclusive education as conceptualized from the perspective of CWSN is also important in assessing the effectiveness of inclusive schools. This study is important in that it:

- Highlights the live experiences of CWSN
- Points out strengths and weaknesses of inclusive schools
- Offers evidence-based insights to enhance practice.
- Child-centred and Rights Based Education supporter

### **Research Questions**

1. In what ways do CWSN perceive their social relationships in model inclusive schools?
2. How do CWSN perceive academic support and teaching practices?
3. What challenges do CWSN experience in model inclusive schools?
4. What are CWSN recommendations for enhanced inclusion?

### **Objectives of the Study**

1. To explore how CWSN perceive social inclusion within model inclusive schools situated in Delhi.
2. To explore academic support and classroom practices from the perspective of CWSN.



3. To know the challenges encountered physically and emotionally by the CWSN.
4. To propose ways to enhance inclusive practices.

## Methodology

### Research Design

A mixed-methods research design was utilized and combined both quantitative and qualitative methodologies to provide an in-depth understanding of the attitude of the students.

### Sample

- **Sample Size:** 80 CWSN
- **Age Group:** 8–16 years
- **Schools:** Model Inclusive schools in Delhi
- **Sampling Technique:** Purposive sampling

### Distribution of Disabilities

Type of Disability	Number	Percentage
Learning Disability	24	30%
Physical Disability	18	22.5%
Hearing Impairment	14	17.5%
Autism Spectrum Disorder	12	15%
Intellectual Disability	12	15%
<b>Total</b>	<b>80</b>	<b>100%</b>

**Tools for Data Collection:** Self-Developed Perception Scale

A self-developed perception scale consisting of 30 statements was used. The scale covered five dimensions:

1. Social inclusion
2. Academic support
3. Teacher attitude



- 4. Physical accessibility
- 5. Emotional well-being

The answers were given using a five-point Likert scale which ranged from Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree.

### Qualitative Tools

- Semi-structured interviews (10 students)

### Procedure of Data Collection

Permission was sought from both the CWSN & parents. Issues of ethics in this case including privacy and voluntariness were ensured. Information was sought in a child-friendly way over a period of six weeks.

### Findings and Analysis

#### Quantitative Findings

##### A. Social Inclusion

Category	Number	Percentage
Positive	44	55%
Neutral	18	22.5%
Negative	18	22.5%

For the purpose of analysis, the levels of social inclusion were grouped into three categories: Positive, Neutral, and Negative. This was based on the scores attained on the Social Inclusion Scale. Those who scored above 67 percent of the maximum possible score were considered to have Positive social Inclusion, those who scored between 34 percent and 66 percent were classified as Neutral, while those who scored below 33 percent were considered to have Negative Social Inclusion.

The results demonstrate that 55% of the respondents have a positive attitude towards social inclusion in model inclusive schools, showing that more than half the respondents are satisfied with the level at which social inclusion is being implemented. At the same time, 22.5% of the respondents each have neutral and negative attitudes towards social inclusion, indicating that many of the respondents either have mixed experiences or are facing challenges concerning social inclusion. While the majority of the respondents have a positive attitude towards social inclusion, there still remain many gaps to be filled.

**B. Academic Support**

Category	Number	Percentage
Positive	38	47.5%
Neutral	16	20%
Negative	26	32.5%

For the purpose of analysis, the levels of academic support were grouped into three categories: Positive, Neutral, and Negative. This was based on the scores attained on the academic support Scale. Those who scored above 67 percent of the maximum possible score were considered to have Positive academic support, those who scored between 34 percent and 66 percent were classified as Neutral, while those who scored below 33 percent were considered to have Negative academic support.

The results show that 47.5% of the respondents have a positive attitude towards academic support in model inclusive schools; this means that nearly half of the respondents are satisfied with the level of support offered. However, 32.5% of the respondents had a negative attitude towards it; this is a bit high and means that the gaps in the academic support for some students are yet to be addressed. In addition to this, 20% of the respondents had a neutral attitude.

**C. Teacher Attitude**

Category	Number	Percentage
Positive	52	65%
Neutral	14	17.5%
Negative	14	17.5%

For the purpose of analysis, the levels of teacher attitude were grouped into three categories: Positive, Neutral, and Negative. This was based on the scores attained on the teacher attitude Scale. Those who scored above 67 percent of the maximum possible score were considered to have Positive teacher attitude, those who scored between 34 percent and 66 percent were classified as Neutral, while those who scored below 33 percent were considered to have Negative teacher attitude.

The data indicates that a combined 65% of respondents have a positive attitude towards teachers' attitudes in inclusive schools. This implies that their attitude towards CWSN is supportive and accepting.



However, both 17.5% of respondents expressed a negative attitude. This implies that although teachers' attitude towards CWSN in inclusive schools generally stands positive, certain discrepancies still remain.

**D. Physical Accessibility**

Category	Number	Percentage
Positive	35	43.75%
Neutral	19	23.75%
Negative	26	32.5%

For the purpose of analysis, the levels of physical accessibility were grouped into three categories: Positive, Neutral, and Negative. This was based on the scores attained on physical accessibility Scale. Those who scored above 67 percent of the maximum possible score were considered to have Positive physical accessibility, those who scored between 34 percent and 66 percent were classified as Neutral, while those who scored below 33 percent were considered to have Negative physical accessibility attitude

The findings show that 43.75% of the respondents have a positive attitude towards physical accessibility in inclusive schools. This indicates that fundamental amenities are being provided to certain students. Contrary to this, 32.5% have a negative attitude towards physical accessibility. This shows that there are major limitations such as lack of infrastructure and inaccessible amenities. Additionally, 23.75% have a neutral attitude towards physical accessibility. This indicates that there are certain inequalities and limitations towards totally being physically accessible.

**E. Emotional Well-being**

Category	Number	Percentage
Positive	41	51.25%
Neutral	17	21.25%
Negative	22	27.5%

For the purpose of analysis, the levels of emotional well-being were grouped into three categories: Positive, Neutral, and Negative. This was based on the scores attained on the emotional well-being Scale. Those who scored above 67 percent of the maximum possible score were considered to have Positive emotional well-being, those who scored between 34 percent and 66 percent were classified as Neutral, while those who scored below 33 percent were considered to have Negative emotional well-being.



The result shows that 51.25% of the respondents have a positive view towards emotional well-being in inclusive schools, implying that more than half of them are satisfied with students being taken care of emotionally. Conversely, 27.5% have a negative view, implying that students face emotional problems. Also, 21.25% have a neutral view, implying that there is a mix. In conclusion, a majority have a positive perception towards emotional well-being; however, extra support systems are required to fill the existing gap.

## **Qualitative Findings**

### **Theme 1: Feeling Accepted but Different**

Some students reported feeling accepted, yet different from peers.

“My friends talk to me, but sometimes I feel I am not like them.” (Student, Age 13)

### **Theme 2: Academic Stress**

Students with learning disabilities expressed stress due to fast teaching pace.

“Teacher explains fast and I cannot write everything.” (Student, Age 11)

### **Theme 3: Physical and Communication Barriers**

Students with physical and hearing impairments reported difficulty moving around and communicating.

“I cannot go upstairs alone.” (Student, Age 14)

### **Theme 4: Emotional Experiences**

Several students expressed fear of being laughed at.

“I feel scared when teacher asks questions.” (Student, Age 10)

## **Discussion**

All the findings, quantitative and qualitative combined, point out that the model inclusive schools in Delhi have achieved partial success. While social acceptance and teacher support are strengths, academic adaptations and accessibility are not so good, and emotional safety is a cause for concern. Qualitative insights enrich the numerical data by unraveling the emotional realities behind the percentage.



## **Conclusion**

The present study concludes that an inclusive school might provide opportunities to CWSN, yet it is not necessarily able to guarantee holistic inclusion for these students. It argues that an injunction to listen to student voice has the potential for transforming inclusive education from a policy to a practice.

## **Recommendations**

1. Schools for CWSN should have special academic plans to cater to their learning needs.
2. Universal design principles focusing on improved accessibility must be incorporated to ensure a barrier-free environment for schools.
3. Teacher training programs should also be held to enhance inclusive teaching.
4. Programs for peer sensitization need to be incorporated for the promotion of acceptance and inclusion.
5. Mental health support services should be offered to promote the emotional well-being of the CWSN.

## **Limitations of the Study**

Small sample size is used in this study; hence, its results may not necessarily portray all- model inclusive schools.

## **Suggestions for Future Research**

1. Perform long-term research to investigate changes occurring in inclusion practices and views.
2. More diverse and bigger samples could be used to improve the study.
3. Do a comparative analysis of schools or other areas to find best practices and difficulties in implementing inclusive practices.

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