

A Comprehensive Review on Inclusive Education: Critical Approach to Supporting Children with Autism

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Abstract

A developmental illness that affects people to varied degrees over a range, autism spectrum disorder (ASD) is defined by difficulty with social interaction, communication, and repetitive activities. This study investigates useful methods for integrating ASD children into regular educational settings. The aim of inclusive education is to integrate students with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) into mainstream classroom environments. The review paper employed a systematic literature review approach, together with comparative policy analysis, and data analysis to detect patterns and gaps. The study examines earlier pertinent studies of the last five years on inclusive education for students with ASD. Working together, with parents, educators, and experts is essential to developing supportive learning environments. By cultivating an environment where differences are celebrated and individual strengths are recognized, we pave the way for a more inclusive and equitable society. Addressing these challenges requires a commitment from all stakeholders to invest in the necessary resources and policy changes that prioritize inclusive practices. To enhance the implementation of inclusive education, the study recommends modifying policies and behaviors. This guarantees that ASD kids get the assistance they require to thrive in the classroom and social situations. In order to better meet the varied needs of children with ASD, it also emphasizes the significance of individualized teaching methods, early intervention, and continuing professional development for educators. An educational culture that celebrates diversity and encourages equal chances for all students is fostered by a collaborative approach.

Keywords: Inclusive education, autism spectrum disorder, mainstream classrooms, educational strategies, social inclusion

INTRODUCTION

The term “inclusive education” describes the approach of teaching all students—including those with a range of needs and abilities—in a collaborative, encouraging setting. This method is predicated on the idea that all kids need to have the chance to study alongside one another, irrespective of their linguistic, intellectual, social, emotional, physical, or other circumstances.

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In the past, students with special needs or impairments were frequently isolated from their peers and placed in separate, specialized classrooms or schools. The idea behind this division was that these pupils needed different learning settings for their requirements to be properly met. The definition of the word “inclusion” is rarely provided and is frequently taken for granted. Because it is predicated on concepts like “justice” and “democracy,” The empirical research on inclusive education frequently adopts a normative approach. These words are difficult to use in actual practice

since their definitions rely on a subjective assessment. Therefore, it is difficult to investigate inclusive education in research and to implement it in educational settings. Understanding inclusive education is investigated by looking at how it affects students with different skill levels, how well support systems work, and how teachers may create an inclusive learning environment. This review also explores the difficulties that legislators and educators have when putting inclusive principles into practice.

Overview of Autism and its Impact on Education

A complex and multifaceted neurodevelopmental illness, autism spectrum disorder (ASD) is defined by a range of symptoms and behaviours that impact behaviour, social interaction, and communication. Since ASD comprises a broad spectrum of skills and difficulties, every person's experience with autism is distinct. Difficulties with social communication and engagement, such as comprehension and reaction to social cues, keeping eye contact, and establishing peer relationships, are common traits. Furthermore, repetitive behaviors and limited interests are common in individuals with autism. These behaviours can take the form of a strong preference for routines, repetitive gestures, or intense focus on particular subjects. Additionally common are sensory sensitivity issues, whereby certain people have increased or decreased sensitivity to many types of stimuli, including sounds, lights, textures, or Odors. Teachers need to use specific tactics that promote social inclusion and communication skills to solve these issues. It's also important to recognize that persons with autism may find transitions and changes in the classroom particularly challenging because of their rigidity and need for regularity, traits that are often associated with the disease. Unexpected schedule changes, new activities, or strange environments can cause anxiety and discomfort in autistic students. Teachers can use techniques including providing advance notice of changes, outlining the day's tasks visually on schedules, and using organized routines that create a predictable and encouraging learning environment to help lessen these difficulties.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT AND EVOLUTION OF INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

Over time, the idea of “Inclusive Education” has undergone substantial change, with several modifications. The emergence of market ideology in the late 18th century had an impact on educational governance, procedures, and results. This change resulted in an increasingly selective and hierarchical system of education, with an increase in the prevalence of exclusionary behaviours and regulations. People who have impairments have historically faced significant social exclusion, with social, political, and civil rights being denied to them. They commonly endured humiliation, annoyance, and dehumanization due to their perceived inferiority. People with impairments were also viewed as societal threats at numerous historical moments, which led to drastic actions like their execution or exploitation as amusement. They were frequently placed in insane asylums and hospitals to save society, where they were merely given coercive care. Numerous academics and researchers have questioned and condemned special education approaches. The goal of an inclusive society should prioritize fairness and the non-discrimination of all individuals, according to Barton (1999). According to Wolfensberger (1993), separating children into different schools and denying them access to education because of their physical circumstances violates their fundamental human rights and breeds stigma and discrimination toward people with disabilities.

Important Models and Theories of Inclusive Education

The Ecological Systems Theory (EST), developed by psychologist Urie Bronfenbrenner, holds that individuals are affected by several interconnected layers of systems in their environment. These systems, which range from intimate partnerships to broader social influences, all influence the formation of development. A detailed explanation may be found below as shown in Figure 1.

In addition to offering a useful foundation for creating inclusive education models, ecological systems theory emphasizes the interdependence of diverse environmental influences in influencing people's experiences and growth as shown in table 1. Since physical, social, and psychological elements interact intricately to shape students' educational experiences and outcomes, inclusive education approaches include principles from the Ecological Systems Theory.

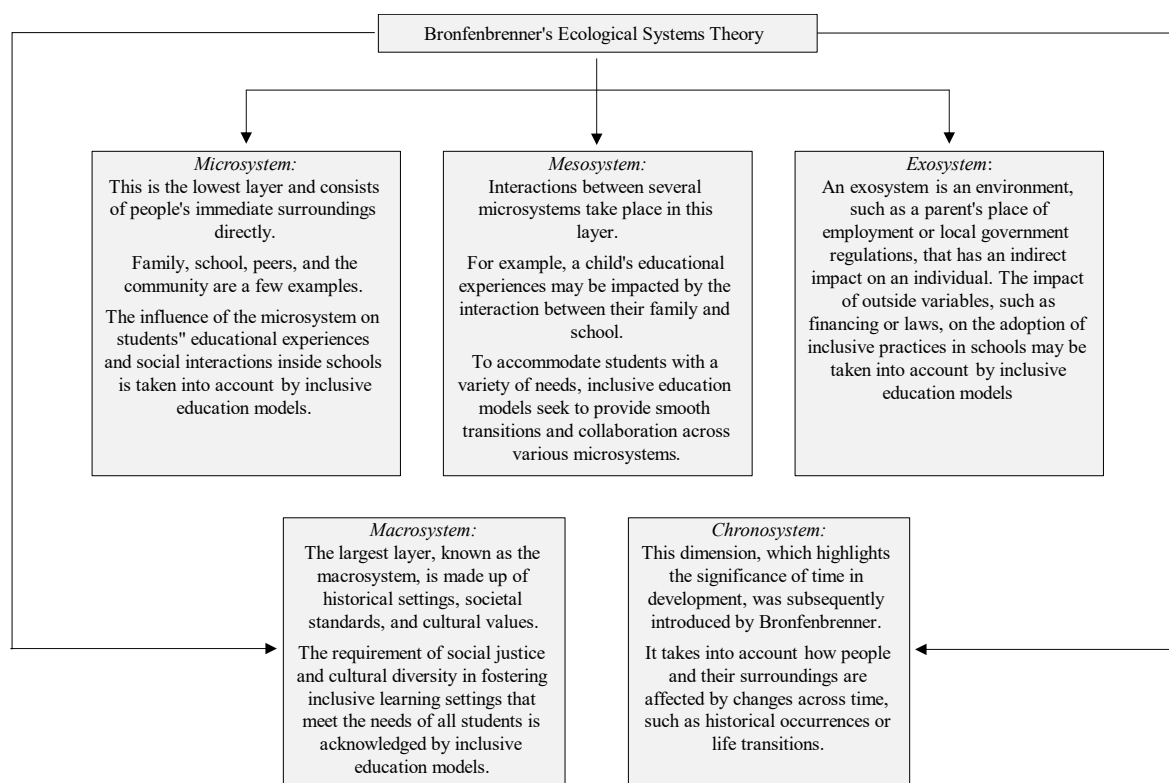


Figure 1. Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (Olivia Guy-Evans).

Table 1. Challenges faced by kids with autism in mainstream schools.

S.N.	Challenges	Explanation
1	Social Interaction Challenges	Difficulty forming friendships, interpreting social cues, and engaging in group activities.
2	Communication Barriers	Difficulty with verbal and nonverbal communication.
3	Sensory Sensitivities	Difficulty processing sensory information in a school setting (noise, crowds).
4	Demands for Specialized Academic Help	Needing tailored instruction to address learning styles.
5	Behavioral Challenges	Tantrums, repetitive behaviors, or difficulty with routines.

Review of Previous Studies on Inclusive Education for Children with Autism

Sun, X. et al. (2013) examined the frequency of autism in China, taking into account students in both regular and special education [1]. In Jilin City, the prevalence was 108 per 10,000, while in Shenzhen and Jiamusi cities, it was 42 and 19 per 10,000, respectively. Lord et al. (2018) discussed the signs of autism spectrum disorder (ASD) in another study [2]. These symptoms include difficulty with social communication, repetitive behaviours, and restricted interests. Even though there isn't a recognized cure for ASD, early, intensive therapy can significantly improve results for affected children. Huang, P. et al. (2012) studied youngsters in the People's Republic of China who had autism spectrum disorders (ASDs) [3]. Their studies include the frequency of ASDs, the diagnosis procedure, laws about disabilities, available treatments, educational opportunities, and the functions of care providers. The study highlighted the necessity of supporting impacted children and their families in China with evidence-based strategies. Hendricks (2010) focused on the difficulties and coping mechanisms that people with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) must deal with at work [4]. Even though those who have ASD are capable and eager to work, dismal employment results continue to occur. It was explored that underemployment is widespread, and many people do not have jobs. Further, the study highlighted the requirement for individualized services that consider each person's requirements, interests, and skills. It was found that effective supports that cover both job duties and interpersonal skills can result in

successful and long-term employment. El-Salahi (2023) also looked at the effects of inclusive school environments on children with autism spectrum disorders [5]. By shedding light on various approaches to inclusion and social engagement, the study offers perceptive perspectives on creating inclusive environments for children with ASD. The validity and reliability of student engagement indicators for children with ASD in inclusive classrooms were examined in this study by Kucharczyk and Hall (2019). By assessing engagement levels, the study contributed to our understanding of the experiences of students with ASD in inclusive learning contexts. In comparison to special education classrooms, research conducted by Zablotsky et al. (2015) showed improvements in academic performance, social skills, and communication [6]. For kids with ASD, the study emphasized the advantages of inclusive education. This study demonstrates the importance of inclusive practices in supporting the overall development of students with ASD.

Hasson, L., (2024) states that the study's major focus was on the value of inclusive practices for kids with ASD attending regular schools [7]. Hasson discussed the inclusion of students with autism spectrum disorders in the classroom. The study explores the perspectives and experiences of parents of autistic children enrolled in regular schools, according to Attard, M. (2023) [8]. The study provided information about these perspectives and experiences. The study by Kucharczyk, S., & Whitby, P. S. (2019), which looked at the forms and correlates of non-attendance among kids with autism spectrum disorders, offers a comprehensive account of school non-attendance trends in this population [9]. The results of Zablotsky B. et al. (2015) shed light on the perspectives and firsthand accounts of special education and general education teachers about the integration of autistic pupils into mainstream classrooms. In 2024, Rohwer examined a range of mixed-methods, quasi-experimental, qualitative, and quantitative research papers. He employed a multipronged strategy that incorporates quasi-experimental, mixed-methods, and qualitative research. An all-inclusive approach allowed for a more in-depth analysis of the challenges and benefits of inclusive education for children with autism spectrum disorders. According to the study, children with ASD were incorporated into mainstream classrooms alongside children who normally develop.

Importance of Inclusive Education

For all children to have fair access to high-quality education, regardless of their skills or origins, inclusive education is crucial. This strategy fosters a sense of belonging among pupils and lessens discrimination, which advances social justice. In diverse learning environments, students benefit from each other's unique perspectives, enhancing their academic and social skills. Inclusive education makes ready the kids for a multiethnic society, teaching them empathy, tolerance, and respect for differences, which are crucial for personal and professional success. inclusive education ensures that every student has the chance to realize their full potential and encourages lifelong learning and active community involvement by defending the rights of all students and eliminating educational disparities.

Purpose and Scope

To critically assess the body of research on inclusive education strategies and practices for children with autism, the review paper "Inclusive Education- A Critical Approach to Supporting Children with Autism" was written. The purpose of this review is to summarize and identify the numerous theoretical and methodological techniques that have been active in earlier research, emphasizing both their advantages and disadvantages. It also aims to investigate the connections and relationships among various works, offering a thorough understanding of the current state of inclusive education for children with autism. To offer a thorough examination of the topic, the review's scope encompasses both qualitative and quantitative research that spans a wide range of viewpoints and settings.

METHODOLOGY

A detailed exploration of several electronic databases, such as PubMed, Google Scholar, Shodhganga, Medline and PsycINFO, was carried out to find pertinent systematic reviews and meta-

analyses that have been published in English during the past ten years. Relevant terms including “qualitative research,” “support strategies,” “autism,” and “inclusive education,” as well as “prevention” and “early detection,” were comprised in the search approach.

Criteria for Inclusion

1. Research focussed on inclusive education approaches tailored to the needs of children with autism.
2. Qualitative research offers in-depth explanations of events and results.
3. Published in credible publications, peer-reviewed papers, and systematic reviews.

Criteria for Exclusion

1. Research not specifically addressing autism.
2. Quantitative research was devoid of a qualitative critique.
3. Articles from non-academic sources or those without peer review.

DISCUSSION

To guarantee that children with autism receive the assistance they require to flourish intellectually and socially, inclusive education is essential. This comprehensive approach integrates students with autism into mainstream classrooms, providing individualized support and accommodations tailored to their unique needs. Research indicates that inclusive settings can significantly enhance the social skills and academic achievements of children with autism, promoting better outcomes compared to segregated environments (Lindsay W. R. et al., 2014) [10]. A critical approach to inclusive education emphasizes the importance of teacher training, as educators need specialized skills and knowledge to effectively support autistic students (Roberts & Simpson, 2016) [11]. Working together, educators, parents, and experts can create a welcoming atmosphere that promotes understanding and respect for one another. Moreover, peer interactions in inclusive settings can facilitate the development of social competencies and reduce the stigma associated with autism (Boutot & Bryant, 2005) [12]. Despite these benefits, challenges such as inadequate resources and varying levels of teacher preparedness persist. Addressing these issues through policy reforms and increased funding can help overcome barriers and ensure that inclusive education truly benefits all students, particularly those with autism.

Critical Analysis of the Findings

To provide a welcoming and supportive learning environment for every kid, several important issues must be resolved as shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Factors Influencing Inclusive Education Practices with Corresponding Findings Explanations.

S.N.	Factors	Findings Explanation
1	Teacher Attitudes	Positive attitudes and training lead to effective inclusion practices.
2	Classroom Adjustments	Individualized plans, routines, and visual aids support learning and behavior management.
3	Student Needs	Positive contacts and a sense of support and understanding are essential for a successful integration.
4	Challenges	Inclusion is hampered by policy-practice gaps, big class numbers, scarce resources, and a lack of training.

IDENTIFICATION OF GAPS IN THE CURRENT RESEARCH AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE STUDIES

1. There isn't much long-term research that examine how inclusive education affects autistic children's social, emotional, and academic outcomes (Harris & Lee, 2021) [13].
2. More diversity in study populations is required in contemporary research. More studies with kids from various socioeconomic, racial, and cultural backgrounds are needed to make sure the results are generalizable (Kim & Park, 2019) [14].

3. There is a lack of data about the efficacy of specific educational treatments intended for autistic children in inclusive settings. Clearer suggestions for optimal practices might be obtained by a comparative study of different techniques (Brown et al., 2021) [15].

According to the prior existing research, we find that holistic educational strategies play a significant role in supporting children with autism. These strategies should seamlessly integrate intellectual, social, and emotional components. In practice, personalized learning plans, sensory-friendly environments, and social-emotional skill-building contribute significantly to the well-being and development of autistic students. Additionally, exploring cutting-edge technologies—such as virtual reality (VR) and artificial intelligence (AI)—holds immense promise. VR immerses students in interactive learning scenarios, making abstract concepts tangible, while AI adapts content to individual needs. We have witnessed how these technologies engage students and enhance their learning experiences. Lastly, peer-mediated therapies foster social integration by actively involving peers in supporting their autistic classmates. These interventions create an inclusive atmosphere and positively impact peer interactions among autistic kids.

CONCLUSION

The pursuit of inclusive education for children with autism represents both a challenge and an opportunity for educators, policymakers, and society. This approach emphasizes the importance of providing equitable educational opportunities that cater to the diverse needs of all students, fostering an environment of acceptance, understanding, and mutual respect. Through the critical analysis of existing practices, it is evident that successful inclusion relies on a multi-faceted strategy that involves collaboration among educators, parents, specialists, and the students themselves.

Key components that enhance the efficacy of inclusive education include tailored teaching strategies, continuous professional development for educators, and the implementation of individualized support plans that are adaptable to the unique needs of each child with autism. Moreover, creating a supportive school culture that values diversity and promotes social interaction among all students is essential for dismantling stereotypes and reducing stigma associated with autism.

However, there remain significant barriers that must be addressed to achieve truly inclusive education. These include a lack of resources, inadequate money, and the requirement for more thorough training programs that give teachers the abilities to help autistic children in an effective manner. Addressing these challenges requires a commitment from all stakeholders to invest in the necessary resources and policy changes that prioritize inclusive practices.

Adopting inclusive education benefits children with autism by allowing them to grow alongside their peers and eventually improves the educational experience for all pupils. By cultivating an environment where differences are celebrated and individual strengths are recognized, we pave the way for a more inclusive and equitable society. The journey towards inclusivity is ongoing, and continued research, advocacy, and innovation will be crucial in ensuring that all children, regardless of their abilities, have access to a quality education that empowers them to reach their full potential.

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