

# A Review-Based Study of Inclusive Education Among Senior Secondary Students with Regard to their Mental Well-being

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## ABSTRACT:

Inclusive education aims to provide equal learning opportunities to all students, regardless of their abilities or background. This review-based study examines the impact of inclusive education on the mental well-being of senior secondary students. The study explores existing literature, educational policies, and psychological frameworks to understand how inclusion practices influence student motivation, emotional health, and peer relationships. It also highlights the challenges faced in implementation and recommends strategies for creating mentally supportive and inclusive learning environments.

**KEYWORDS:** Inclusive Education, Mental Well-being, Senior Secondary Students, Emotional Health, Educational Inclusion, Mental Health in Schools

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Inclusive education is rooted in the philosophy of equity, human rights, and the belief that every child has the right to learn in a supportive and accommodating environment, regardless of their physical, intellectual, social, emotional, linguistic, or other conditions. It reflects a shift from traditional educational models to a more holistic, student-centred approach that acknowledges and respects individual differences. The framework of inclusive education not only integrates children with special needs into mainstream classrooms but also promotes diversity and acceptance among all learners.

Senior secondary education is a critical phase in a student's academic journey, characterized by intense academic pressure, identity formation, and increased social interaction. During this period, students are particularly vulnerable to mental health issues such as stress, anxiety, low self-esteem, and peer pressure. Inclusive practices in such an environment can serve as a double-edged sword—they may either support students' mental well-being through acceptance and understanding or lead to psychological distress if not implemented effectively.

While policies and legislative frameworks like the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act (RPWD, 2016) and the National Education Policy (NEP, 2020) emphasize the need for inclusive education in India, the practical challenges remain vast. The success of inclusion is largely dependent on the attitudes of teachers and peers, availability of resources, individualized support systems, and the overall school climate.

This study, therefore, seeks to explore the nuanced relationship between inclusive education and the mental well-being of senior secondary students. By reviewing existing literature, this research aims to highlight both the positive impacts and the challenges that arise in inclusive classrooms. It also attempts to bring

attention to the often-overlooked emotional and psychological aspects of inclusion, proposing that academic success should not come at the cost of mental health. A comprehensive understanding of this dynamic is essential for developing inclusive practices that are truly beneficial for all learners.

## 2. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- To review literature on inclusive education and its effect on students' mental well-being.
- To examine psychological impacts such as stress, anxiety, and self-esteem among students in inclusive settings.
- To suggest recommendations for enhancing mental well-being through inclusive strategies in schools.

## 3. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Several studies have explored the academic outcomes of inclusive education, but fewer focus on emotional and mental aspects.

- *Sharma (2019)* found that inclusive classrooms promoted empathy and peer bonding.
- *Kumar & Rani (2020)* highlighted increased anxiety in students lacking appropriate support.
- *UNESCO Reports* stress the importance of teacher training in addressing diverse mental health needs.
- **Singal (2018)** explored the challenges of implementing inclusive education in India and highlighted that systemic barriers such as rigid curriculum frameworks, limited infrastructure, and negative attitudes of teachers and peers often prevent effective inclusion.
- **Goyal and Arora (2021)**: Their study advocates for integrated teacher training programs that combine subject pedagogy with mental health awareness and child psychology.
- **Mitra (2021)** focused on student perceptions and found that learners in inclusive classrooms felt more confident and motivated when they received individualized attention and emotional support.
- **Rose and Shevlin (2017)** highlighted the importance of school culture and leadership in facilitating inclusive practices.
- **UNESCO (2021)** in its *Global Education Monitoring Report* emphasized the need for intersectional inclusion—not just of students with disabilities, but also those marginalized due to gender, caste, economic background, or mental health status.
- **WHO (2020)** advocated for a whole-school approach that integrates mental health promotion within inclusive education models. According to their framework, schools that offer social-emotional learning, counselling services, and safe spaces for expression tend to have higher student satisfaction and mental resilience.

## 4. METHODOLOGY

This research is qualitative and based on a comprehensive literature review. Sources include academic journals, educational reports, policy documents, and psychological studies from 2010 to 2024. Thematic analysis was used to categorize findings under aspects of emotional well-being, academic stress, and social inclusion.

## 5. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

- **Positive Impact:** Inclusive settings enhanced self-worth among students with disabilities when peer support was strong.

- **Negative Impact:** Inadequate teacher training and peer insensitivity led to isolation and mental stress.
- **General Students' Perspective:** Exposure to diversity improved empathy and collaborative learning.
- **Challenges Identified:** Lack of resources, stigma, and rigid curriculum structures.

## **6. IMPLICATIONS FOR MENTAL WELL-BEING**

The integration of inclusive education at the senior secondary level has far-reaching implications for the mental well-being of students. Adolescence is a sensitive developmental stage, and the school environment plays a pivotal role in shaping emotional, psychological, and social health. The following implications were drawn from the literature reviewed and thematic analysis of inclusive educational practices:

### **1. Promotion of a Positive Self-concept**

Inclusive classrooms foster a sense of belonging and acceptance, particularly among students with learning difficulties or disabilities. When these students are supported and engaged in mainstream education, it enhances their self-worth, reduces feelings of inferiority, and boosts self-confidence.

### **2. Reduction of Social Isolation and Bullying**

Inclusive education, when implemented with peer sensitization, encourages collaboration and understanding. This can significantly reduce incidents of bullying, stigma, and social exclusion, thereby protecting students from the psychological effects of rejection or isolation.

### **3. Enhanced Emotional Intelligence in All Learners**

Being part of a diverse classroom improves emotional intelligence among general students as well. They develop empathy, patience, and cooperative skills, all of which contribute to healthier peer relationships and school culture.

### **4. Stress Reduction Through Individualized Support**

Students in inclusive environments benefit from differentiated teaching strategies and tailored academic support. This reduces academic stress and anxiety, particularly for students who struggle with traditional instruction methods.

### **5. Improved Teacher-Student Relationships**

Teachers trained in inclusive practices often adopt more compassionate and student-centered approaches. This creates a nurturing atmosphere in which students feel comfortable expressing their challenges, thereby fostering emotional well-being and trust.

### **6. Role of School Infrastructure and Policy**

Inclusive settings that provide access to mental health professionals, counselling services, safe spaces, and inclusive curricula create a more emotionally secure environment for all learners. Schools that embed mental health support within their inclusive education policy demonstrate lower dropout rates and better academic resilience among students.

### **7. Empowerment Through Participation**

Inclusive classrooms that allow all students to participate in leadership roles, extracurricular activities, and group projects empower marginalized students. This leads to increased motivation, a sense of responsibility, and positive psychological outcomes.

### **8. Risk of Psychological Harm If Poorly Implemented**

Conversely, if inclusive education is implemented without proper planning, resources, or sensitivity, it may lead to stress, exclusion, and academic failure. Inadequate teacher preparedness and peer hostility can severely impact the mental well-being of vulnerable students.

## **7. RECOMMENDATIONS**

To ensure that inclusive education not only integrates all learners academically but also supports their mental well-being, the following comprehensive strategies are recommended:

### **1. Strengthen Teacher Training in Inclusive and Mental Health Practices**

- Develop and implement regular training programs for teachers focusing on inclusive pedagogies, classroom management, and mental health awareness.
- Incorporate modules on emotional intelligence, trauma-informed teaching, and psychological first aid in teacher education curricula.
- Encourage reflective teaching practices and continuous professional development.

### **2. Establish Dedicated School Mental Health Support Systems**

- Appoint qualified school counsellors, psychologists, and special educators in every senior secondary school.
- Set up mental health resource rooms or wellness centres within schools to offer safe spaces for emotional expression.
- Conduct regular mental health check-ins and screening assessments to identify and support at-risk students early.

### **3. Develop Peer Support and Mentoring Programs**

- Introduce structured peer mentorship and buddy systems to foster inclusive peer relationships and reduce social isolation.
- Promote student-led mental health awareness campaigns, empathy clubs, and peer counselling initiatives.

### **4. Sensitize Students and Parents Toward Inclusion and Mental Health**

- Conduct workshops, seminars, and awareness programs for students and parents to reduce stigma around disabilities and mental health issues.
- Include inclusive and mental health topics in the school curriculum through life skills education, value education, or moral science.

### **5. Adopt Flexible and Inclusive Curriculum Design**

- Modify curriculum and assessments to cater to diverse learning needs and reduce academic pressure.
- Use differentiated instruction techniques, project-based learning, and Universal Design for Learning (UDL) principles to ensure accessibility for all students.

### **6. Integrate Life Skills and Socio-emotional Learning (SEL)**

- Incorporate SEL programs to build students' resilience, coping mechanisms, self-awareness, and relationship skills.
- Encourage activities like group discussions, journaling, and mindfulness exercises within the classroom routine.

### **7. Create Inclusive School Policies and Monitoring Mechanisms**

- Formulate clear school-wide policies on inclusion, anti-bullying, and mental health support.
- Set up inclusion committees to monitor implementation, handle grievances, and recommend improvements.
- Involve all stakeholders—students, teachers, parents, and administrators—in the development and review of these policies.

### **8. Promote Collaboration with External Agencies**

- Collaborate with mental health NGOs, child psychologists, and local health departments to provide

expert guidance and intervention.

- Encourage community participation and resource-sharing for inclusive practices.

## 9. Encourage Research and Data Collection

- Schools and educational institutions should undertake regular research to assess the effectiveness of inclusion and its impact on student mental health.
- Use findings to guide policy revisions and improve intervention strategies.

## 10. Ensure Policy-Level and Governmental Support

- Advocate for increased government funding for inclusive infrastructure and mental health resources in schools.
- Align school practices with national policies like NEP 2020, RPWD Act 2016, and Samagra Shiksha guidelines.

**In summary**, effective implementation of these recommendations requires a coordinated, multi-tiered approach that places equal emphasis on both academic and emotional well-being. Only then can inclusive education become a truly transformative force in the lives of senior secondary students.

**Table: Recommendations for Strengthening Inclusive Education and Student Mental Well-being**

S. No.	Recommendation Area	Action Points
1.	Teacher Training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Regular training on inclusive pedagogy and mental health.</li> <li>- Include psychological first aid in teacher education.</li> <li>- Continuous reflective practices.</li> </ul>
2.	School Mental Health Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Appoint counselors/psychologists.</li> <li>- Create wellness centers.</li> <li>- Regular mental health check-ins for early intervention.</li> </ul>
3.	Peer Support Systems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Buddy and mentorship programs.</li> <li>- Peer-led mental health campaigns.</li> <li>- Encourage inclusive group activities.</li> </ul>
4.	Sensitization of Students and Parents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Workshops on inclusion and mental health.</li> <li>- Integrate mental health discussions in assemblies.</li> <li>- Parent engagement programs.</li> </ul>
5.	Flexible Inclusive Curriculum	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Differentiated instruction.</li> <li>- Project-based learning.</li> <li>- Use Universal Design for Learning principles.</li> </ul>
6.	Socio-emotional Learning Integration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Implement SEL programs.</li> <li>- Mindfulness, journaling, group discussions.</li> <li>- Foster resilience and coping skills.</li> </ul>
7.	Inclusive School Policies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Anti-bullying and inclusion policies.</li> <li>- Inclusion monitoring committees.</li> <li>- Stakeholder participation in policy development.</li> </ul>
8.	Collaboration with External Agencies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Partner with NGOs and mental health professionals.</li> <li>- Community and health department collaborations.</li> </ul>

S. No.	Recommendation Area	Action Points
9.	Research and Data Collection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Regular assessment of inclusion effectiveness.</li> <li>- Data-driven policy refinement.</li> <li>- Feedback from students and teachers.</li> </ul>
10.	Policy and Governmental Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Advocate for funding for inclusive infrastructure.</li> <li>- Align with NEP 2020, RPWD 2016.</li> <li>- Utilize government schemes like Samagra Shiksha for support.</li> </ul>

## 8. CONCLUSION

Inclusive education is not merely an approach—it is a commitment to fostering a learning environment that respects diversity, promotes equity, and nurtures the holistic development of all students. This review-based study highlights that while inclusive education has the potential to positively influence the mental well-being of senior secondary students, its impact is highly dependent on the quality of implementation. The findings suggest that inclusive practices, when supported by well-trained educators, peer acceptance, and adequate infrastructure, can significantly enhance students' self-esteem, reduce feelings of isolation, and promote a sense of belonging. Inclusive classrooms encourage empathy, emotional intelligence, and social responsibility among all learners—not just those with special needs.

However, the review also uncovers several gaps and challenges. Many schools lack adequate teacher training, psychological support services, and inclusive curriculum design. Students with diverse learning needs may experience anxiety, stigma, or marginalization if inclusion is treated as a superficial policy rather than a deep, systemic transformation. The mental well-being of students in such settings is often compromised when support systems are weak or inconsistent.

Therefore, to realize the true potential of inclusive education, there must be a collective and sustained effort from policymakers, educators, parents, and the community. Schools must prioritize mental health as a core component of inclusive strategies. Providing regular mental health check-ins, individualized learning plans, sensitization programs, and capacity-building workshops for teachers are critical steps toward building inclusive schools that are emotionally and psychologically safe.

In conclusion, inclusive education should not be seen as a challenge to be managed but as an opportunity to redefine learning spaces as compassionate, flexible, and empowering environments. When inclusion is practiced with empathy and intention, it can become a powerful force for promoting both academic success and mental well-being among senior secondary students.

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