

Inclusive Physical Education: Reviewing Policies, Practices, and Challenges

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Abstract

Global recognition has been accorded to inclusive physical education for its significance in promoting equity and participation among all students. However, there is still little study on this subject, especially in secondary schools. In this article review the various literature's study on policies, practices, and challenges in physical education. This review highlight that inclusive physical education faces numerous challenges, including budget constraints, outdated curricula, inadequate teacher training, and limited student participation. These issues hinder the effective implementation of physical education in schools, especially in India. To ensure inclusivity, physical activities must be tailored to individual needs and capabilities, particularly for marginalized groups and students with disabilities. Teachers should assess students individually and adopt diverse instructional methods to foster meaningful participation. With proper training and updated practices, educators can help all students achieve key learning milestones. Promoting inclusivity in physical education ensures equal learning opportunities and supports holistic student development.

Keywords: Inclusive Physical Education, Students, Physical Activities, Teachers, Policies, Practices, Challenges, Special Education Needs (SEN).

1 Introduction

The goal of inclusive education is to eradicate social exclusion, based on the idea that education serves as a social foundation. It has gained international recognition as a fundamental educational strategy. The Salamanca Statement influenced the development of the inclusive education concept, which states that

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all children have the fundamental right to an education and should be given the chance to attain and sustain a satisfactory level of learning. Additionally, students with special education needs (SEN) should be able to attend regular schools, which should provide them with a child-centered pedagogy that can meet their needs [1]. The advantages of inclusive education have been empirically studied since the establishment of this educational philosophy. These benefits include helping children with and without SEN build a more positive self-concept, improve their social connections, and improve their academic learning. Students with SEN may get a quality education in mainstream schools because to the inclusive education concept, the relevant laws and regulations that are put into place, and "the evidence-based research in this field" [2], [3].

Physical education is no longer an exception to the need to conduct inclusive education in all educational institutions. As an integral component of the larger physical education framework, inclusive physical education must be included into the implementation process in accordance with inclusive principles [4], [5]. For kids with and without disabilities, inclusive physical education promotes the development of their physical, mental, and social well-being. In general education settings, it is the process of teaching students with disabilities alongside their classmates while fostering an atmosphere that encourages participation, learning, and growth [6]. Fostering a feeling of belonging is the main objective of inclusive physical education, where all students feel appreciated, welcomed, and encouraged to reach their maximum potential in the areas of motor skills, physical fitness, and realizing the significance of leading a healthy lifestyle [7]. The inclusive physical education learning process should include more than just allowing "students with disabilities" to see their counterparts without impairments engage in activities. Rather, it must guarantee their active participation in the educational process. Unfortunately, a number of examples demonstrate that "inclusive physical education" still falls short of this goal, often placing children with disabilities on the periphery of participation [8]. To overcome these obstacles, physical education programs must include instructors, models, curriculum, and methodologies that can provide a variety of learning opportunities for children while maintaining everyone's safety and active participation [9].

A. Inclusive Physical Education

The expression "inclusive PE" refers to a physical education course that is part of the general education curriculum (Gen Ed) and is open to all students. This covers any kid with a handicap who may or may not be getting special education instruction as part of adapted physical education (APE). (Students with disabilities get APE as a component of their special education programs.) In order to help everyone succeed, inclusive physical education, which is a component of general education services, pairs kids with their peers while providing assistance and appropriate adjustments [10].

B. Best Practices in Inclusive Physical Education

- **Individual Interaction:** Tailor physical activities to the unique capabilities and needs of each individual. Create customized programs after evaluating each student to identify their areas of strength and weakness.

- **Inclusive Curriculum:** If comprehensive education is to be implemented, it is imperative that all students attend the same institutions and classrooms. It describes real educational opportunities for populations who have previously been condemned, such as children with impairments and minority language speakers.
- **Specific Education:** Provide physical activities that are tailored to the unique needs and capabilities of each individual. Create customized programs after evaluating each student to determine their areas of strength and weakness.
- **Teacher Cooperation:** Students with special needs are helped to reach important learning milestones by instructors who use a range of instructional strategies tailored to their individual needs. It really depends on when and how they want to study. All kids are capable of learning. Everybody learns in a different manner, regardless of specific requirements.

C. Challenges in Physical Education

Without a doubt, physical education is essential to kids' growth and the development of their capacity for creative thought. It is not exclusively for students; physical education is a continuous educational experience that can be obtained by working professionals and adults as well. Despite all of the advantages, physical education has a number of problems [11]. The following are the problems with physical education.

- **Budget Constraints:** In physical education, the primary cause of the significant issue is the tight budget or budget reduction. It is difficult for many schools to get enough financing and use funds and costs in the teaching process, particularly in rural regions. The cost of employing a physical education instructor becomes prohibitive, necessitating the elimination of physical education in schools due to budgetary constraints.
- **Lack of Teacher Recruitment:** Schools struggle to hire physical education instructors because of financial limitations and a shortage of available positions. Schools face difficulties in integrating physical education into their curriculum due to inadequate teacher recruitment. Because of low application rates, there were only a few spots available each year for physical education instructors.
- **Lack of Student Engagement:** Physical education implementation is also significantly influenced by students' engagement. Participation in physical activities is challenging for students because they lack drive and self-esteem. Physical education implementation in schools is hampered by low student involvement rates.
- **Improper Curriculum:** Physical education has received very less attention in the Indian educational system's curriculum. There are only earlier versions of the physical education curriculum, and not many revisions have been made. Teachers encounter difficulties in instructing students on contemporary terminology as a consequence of an inadequate curriculum. Consequently, children develop a diminished enthusiasm for "physical education and physical activities".
- **Improper Teacher Training:** A number of educators lack the necessary training to effectively instruct students using the new methodology. Physical education is difficult to implement in schools because of a lack of teacher preparation. It is also challenging for instructors to interact

with pupils, maintain teacher-student relationships, and provide them new tasks when they don't comprehend the subject effectively.

D. Physical education (school curriculum) policies

"Health is Wealth" is a widely accepted adage. To get a better understanding of "the position of physical education in our school curriculum", the following short explanation of how it has been represented in key policy and curriculum papers may be helpful [12], [13].

- **“Report of the Secondary Education Commission (1952-53)”**: Regarding health and physical education, the panel that was tasked with examining the issues facing secondary state school education as a whole offered the following recommendations.
- **“Health Education”**: It is imperative that no state overlook the significance of health education and physical fitness. As of now, the primary focus has been on the academic aspect of education, with inadequate attention paid to the physical well-being of students and the preservation of appropriate standards. In addition to recognizing the importance of health education, students should also acquire the knowledge necessary to maintain and enhance their health. A comprehensive medical assessment should be performed on every kid, and school programs should include activities aimed at promoting and protecting health. Since a school child's health is influenced by both their time at school and, more importantly, their time at home and in their neighborhood, school health services need to be expanded to the community. In educational institutions, not little is being done to address child malnutrition.
- **“Physical Education”**: To improve students' physical and mental well-being, foster their interests and abilities for leisure, and encourage teamwork, sportsmanship, and respect for others, a variety of activities should be organized. There is a lot more to physical education than drill or a set of controlled exercises. It encompasses games and physical activities of all kinds that support mental and physical growth. In order to advance the physical education curriculum, the school should approach the community and ask for its help. Physical education won't be successful unless all of the school's instructors take part in the activities with the physical educator.
- **“Education Commission (1964-66) known as Kothari Commission”**: Physical education serves educational purposes in addition to promoting physical fitness. It fosters the development of specific qualities, such as perseverance, team spirit, leadership, and obedience to regulations, as well as physical efficacy and mental acuity. Sports and games, rhythmic exercises, group handling exercises, development exercises, and excursion activities should all be a part of it. The syllabus should be designed to foster the development of fundamental skills in children, including the ability to walk efficiently, run, and hurl, during "the pre-primary and early primary stages". Athletics, games, and sports in their typical forms may be included in the secondary school curriculum. Boys' and girls' curricula should be designed independently after the elementary level. Girls will find rhythmic activities appealing, and they also enjoy less strenuous sports, such as badminton and throw-ball.

2 Literature Review

(Liu et al., 2025) [14] The variables impacting students with disabilities' (SWD) engagement in physical activities (PA) in integrated school settings are examined in this study. The dynamic model emphasizes that SWD engagement in PA in inclusive settings cannot be well explained by a single component. In order to develop customized strategies that address the needs of SWD and cultivate a supportive environment, educators must take into account physiological, behavioral, and cognitive factors, along with "mediating factors and processes (three phases)".

(Rubiana et al., 2025) [15] Using bibliometric analysis based on information from the Scopus database, this research explores the topic of "inclusive physical education in secondary schools". The study comes to the conclusion that there are still large gaps in the literature, highlighting the need of further research to improve knowledge and application in this area. Extension of research to elementary school inclusive physical education and an emphasis on strategies to enhance the ability and involvement of kids with disabilities in inclusive environments are among the recommendations.

(Russo et al., 2025) [16] Primary and middle school students' perceptions of physical education courses were investigated in this research, with particular attention paid to cooperation, pleasure and well-being, teacher conduct, the inclusion of both handicapped and nondisabled students, and general classroom conduct. The study emphasizes the need for elementary and, more importantly, middle school physical education instructors to foster students' wellbeing by designing inclusive and engaging physical education programs. Individual characteristics as well as gender disparities should be taken into account in physical education sessions. The findings of this research establish the groundwork for future investigations that will enhance the well-being of students and refine inclusive PE strategies.

(Abadinas et al., 2024) [17] This research sought to investigate the complex difficulties faced by children with special needs during physical education (PE) lessons. Two sub-themes were identified in the findings: "physical activity limitations and disability-related academic barriers", which are barriers to physical activity, and psychosocial barriers, which include self-worth struggles and social exclusion in physical education (PE) classes. Due to these obstacles, physical education programs must be inclusive and flexible in order to meet the various requirements of all children and foster an environment in which everyone can participate fully and benefit from physical education.

(C. Balay-as & O. Bandoc, 2024) [18] sought to comprehend the difficulties and methods for intervention that physical education instructors face while evaluating learning results using the online mode. The results showed that primary school physical education instructors had difficulties while evaluating online PE instruction, but they overcame these difficulties. During the process of describing the challenges, three themes emerged: the challenges of trusting, monitoring, and observing students' output. The participants found the online assessment of the PE learning objectives challenging, but they also recognized that part of the role of instructors is to figure out how to get beyond these challenges. The results provide insightful information that might help PE instructors evaluate students' learning outcomes in the online learning environment.

(Guerrero & Guerrero Puerta, 2023) [19] It is a global challenge to attain inclusive education in order to guarantee gender equality and parity. Therefore, it is important to reconsider the different locations and areas in the educational setting where gender inequality is created. According to the findings, some research has specifically addressed the requirement for physical education instructors to be mindful of possible gender-biased structures while creating curriculum, methods, and resources. Equal chances for all children to engage are essential for inclusive physical education classrooms, according to other studies. Furthermore, it is important to put into practice tactics that encourage good attitudes toward physical exercise by dismantling old gender barriers and addressing any underlying gender preconceptions. Finally, a variety of instructional techniques that might assist instructors in establishing a fair learning environment in physical education courses have been found by this systematic research.

(Mane et al., 2018) [20] Finding out the current state of "inclusive physical education (IPE) policies and practices" at Maharashtra's universities was the aim of this descriptive research. We used the basic random sample approach to choose five universities from various Maharashtra areas. "The head of the physical education (PE) department, the teaching staff of the PE department", and the students themselves provided reactions to the IPE policies and practices in a status survey that was carried out using a researcher-designed structured interview, teachers' questionnaire, and students' questionnaire. Positive attitudes about IPE policies and procedures served as the foundation for a qualitative analysis of the data that was gathered. The conclusion was that there are no specific IPE policies or procedures, and that those that are implemented are done so on an individual basis throughout the teacher training courses for B.P.Ed. and M.P.Ed.

(Kassaw et al., 2017) [21] In the context of secondary schools in the North Shewa Zone, the primary objective of this study was to examine the challenges and opportunities associated with "the inclusion of students with physical disabilities in physical education practical classes". The study found that teachers did not support and encourage students with disabilities in physical education practical classes; that physical education teachers lacked sufficient training and experience; that there were no relevant curriculum materials, such as teachers' guides or textbooks, for SWD; that Woreda and zone education bureau officers did not provide professional support to schools to promote inclusive PE; and that school administration did not show any consideration or support.

3 Conclusion

In conclusion, inclusive physical education faces several challenges, primarily due to budget constraints, outdated curricula, limited teacher recruitment, and insufficient training. Financial limitations and staff shortages hinder schools' ability to hire qualified physical education teachers, making it difficult to integrate physical education effectively into the academic framework. Additionally, the Indian education system places minimal emphasis on physical education, often relying on outdated teaching methods and failing to provide modern, inclusive approaches. A lack of student motivation and low self-esteem further reduce participation in physical activities. To address these challenges, it is essential to reform the curriculum, invest in teacher training, and adopt personalized physical education strategies. Tailoring

physical activities to suit individual needs and abilities fosters a more inclusive environment, especially for historically marginalized groups such as minority language speakers and children with disabilities. Assessing each student's strengths and challenges and designing individualized programs encourages meaningful participation and learning. Teachers must utilize varied instructional strategies to help students with special needs reach key developmental milestones. Every student is capable of learning; the approach must be adapted to suit their unique pace and style. Inclusive physical education can only succeed with a comprehensive, student-centered, and equity-focused framework that supports all learners.

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