

EMOTIONAL ADJUSTMENT OF CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL NEEDS IN INCLUSIVE SCHOOLS

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Abstract

Inclusive education has emerged as an important approach for ensuring equal educational opportunities for children with special needs. Emotional adjustment is a crucial factor that influences the social participation, learning outcomes, and psychological well-being of such children in inclusive settings. The present study explores the level of emotional adjustment of children with special needs studying in inclusive schools and identifies the factors influencing their emotional development. A descriptive survey method was adopted, and data were collected from students with special needs studying in inclusive schools through standardized emotional adjustment scales and observation techniques. The findings reveal that inclusive environments can positively influence emotional stability, peer interaction, and self-confidence when adequate support systems are provided. However, lack of teacher training, inadequate resources, and social stigma often hinder the emotional adjustment of these children. The study highlights the importance of teacher sensitivity, peer support, and inclusive classroom practices for enhancing emotional well-being.

Keywords: Inclusive education, emotional adjustment, children with special needs, social integration, psychological development.

Introduction

Education is considered a fundamental human right and a powerful tool for social development and equality. Modern educational policies emphasize providing equal educational opportunities to all learners regardless of their physical, intellectual, social, emotional, linguistic, or other conditions. In this context, inclusive education has emerged as an important educational approach that aims to integrate children with special needs into mainstream classrooms along with their typically developing peers (UNESCO, 2020). Inclusive education promotes the idea that, schools should accommodate the diverse learning needs of all students and create supportive environments where every learner can participate actively in the learning process. According to the Salamanca Statement, inclusive education ensures that children with disabilities receive quality education within regular schools while receiving necessary support services (UNESCO, 1994). This approach not only enhances academic learning but also facilitates social interaction, emotional development, and psychological well-being.

Children with special needs often face multiple challenges in their educational journey. These challenges include learning difficulties, communication barriers, social isolation, low self-confidence, and emotional stress. Emotional adjustment refers to an individual's ability to maintain emotional stability, cope with environmental demands, and develop positive interpersonal relationships. For children with disabilities, emotional adjustment becomes particularly important because they frequently encounter situations that may lead to feelings of anxiety, frustration, rejection, or inferiority (Hallahan, Kauffman & Pullen, 2015). In inclusive school settings, children with special needs interact with peers without disabilities, which provides opportunities for developing social skills, emotional understanding, and self-confidence. Positive peer interactions can enhance emotional security and promote a sense of belonging among students with disabilities. Research suggests that inclusive classrooms help children develop empathy, tolerance, and acceptance of diversity, thereby contributing to the emotional well-being of all students (Ainscow & Miles, 2008).

However, the success of inclusive education largely depends on the emotional and social adjustment of children with special needs. Emotional adjustment involves the ability to manage emotions effectively, adapt to social situations, and maintain healthy relationships with peers and teachers. Children who experience difficulties in emotional adjustment may show behavioural problems, withdrawal from social interaction, or reduced participation in classroom activities (Santrock, 2011). Several factors influence the emotional adjustment of children with special needs in inclusive schools.

These factors include teacher attitudes, classroom environment, peer acceptance, parental support, and availability of support services such as counselling and special education resources. Teachers play a crucial role in fostering emotional adjustment by creating supportive learning environments, encouraging positive peer interactions, and implementing inclusive teaching strategies (Sharma, Loreman & Forlin, 2012). Studies indicate that when inclusive education is properly implemented, it can significantly enhance the emotional and social development of children with disabilities. Interaction with peers provides opportunities for modelling appropriate social behaviours, improving communication skills, and developing positive self-concept. At the same time, inadequate support systems or negative attitudes from peers and teachers may hinder emotional adjustment and lead to feelings of exclusion (Avramidis & Norwich, 2002).

In the Indian context, policies such as the Right to Education Act (2009) and the National Education Policy (2020) emphasize the importance of inclusive education and the integration of children with special needs into mainstream schools. These policies highlight the need for creating inclusive environments that support the academic, social, and emotional development of learners with disabilities.

Therefore, understanding the emotional adjustment of children with special needs in inclusive schools is essential for improving educational practices and developing effective intervention strategies. By examining the emotional experiences of these children, educators and policymakers can design supportive programs that promote their psychological well-being and successful participation in inclusive educational settings.

Objectives of the Study

The study was conducted with the following objectives:

1. To examine the level of emotional adjustment of children with special needs in inclusive schools.
2. To identify the factors affecting emotional adjustment of children with special needs.
3. To compare emotional adjustment between different categories of disabilities.
4. To explore the role of teachers and peers in supporting emotional development.

Hypothesis

H₀1: There is no significant difference in emotional adjustment among children with special needs studying in inclusive schools.

Methodology

Research methodology refers to the systematic procedures and techniques used for collecting, analysing, and interpreting data in order to answer research questions and achieve the objectives of the study. The present study aimed to investigate the emotional adjustment of children with special needs studying in inclusive schools. The methodology adopted for the study is described below.

Research Design

The present study employed a descriptive survey research design. Descriptive research is used to describe the characteristics, conditions, and relationships among variables without manipulating them. This design is appropriate for studying psychological and behavioural variables such as emotional adjustment because it allows researchers to collect data from participants in their natural educational settings. The descriptive survey method helped the researcher gather information regarding the emotional adjustment levels of children with special needs and the factors influencing their emotional behavior in inclusive classroom environments. According to Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2018), the descriptive survey method is widely used in educational research to obtain information about existing conditions and to analyse relationships among variables.

Population of the Study

In the present study, the population consisted of children with special needs studying in inclusive schools at the primary and upper primary levels. These children included students with different types of disabilities such as intellectual disabilities, learning disabilities, and hearing impairments.

Sample and Sampling Technique

A sample is a smaller group selected from the population to represent the characteristics of the entire population. For the present study, a total of 45 children with special needs studying in inclusive schools were selected as the sample.

Sample Distribution

The participants were selected using the purposive sampling technique. This sampling method was

Category of Disability	Number of Students
Intellectual Disability	20
Learning Disability	15
Hearing Impairment	10

chosen because the researcher intentionally selected students who were identified as children with special needs and were studying in inclusive classrooms. Purposive sampling is commonly used in educational and psychological research when specific characteristics are required for the study (Best & Kahn, 2016).

Variables of the Study

The present research included the following variables:

- Independent Variable- Inclusive school environment
- Dependent Variable- Emotional adjustment of children with special needs

Tools Used for Data Collection

The following tools were used to collect data for the study:

1. Emotional Adjustment Scale

A standardized Emotional Adjustment Scale was used to measure the emotional stability and adjustment level of children with special needs. The scale consisted of statements related to emotional responses such as anxiety, self-confidence, social interaction, frustration, and emotional stability.

Students responded to the items using a rating scale which helped determine their level of emotional adjustment.

2. Observation Schedule

An observation schedule was used to record students' emotional behaviours within the classroom environment. The observation focused on:

- Interaction with peers
- Participation in classroom activities
- Emotional reactions to success and failure
- Ability to manage frustration

3. Teacher Interview Schedule

A structured interview schedule was used to collect qualitative information from teachers regarding the emotional behaviour and adjustment patterns of children with special needs in inclusive classrooms. Teachers' were asked questions about students' social relationships, emotional responses, and classroom participation.

Data Collection Procedure

The data collection process was carried out systematically to ensure reliability and accuracy of the information collected. The researcher first obtained permission from the school authorities to conduct the study. After receiving approval, the researcher visited the selected inclusive schools and identified students with special needs with the help of teachers and school records. The emotional adjustment scale was administered to the selected students under the guidance of the researcher and teachers. Necessary instructions were provided to ensure that students understood the items. Simultaneously, classroom observations were conducted to record the emotional behaviour and social interactions of the students during teaching-learning activities. Teachers were also interviewed to gather additional insights regarding the emotional adjustment of students.

Data analysis and interpretation

Table 1: Distribution of Students According to Level of Emotional Adjustment

Level of Emotional Adjustment	Number of Students	Percentage
High Emotional Adjustment	12	26.7%
Moderate Emotional Adjustment	20	44.4%
Low Emotional Adjustment	13	28.9%
Total	45	100%

Interpretation

The above table shows the distribution of children with special needs according to their emotional adjustment levels in inclusive schools. It is evident from the data that 44.4% of students fall under the moderate level of emotional adjustment, which indicates that most children with special needs are able to manage their emotions and interact socially with peers to some extent. However, they may still require emotional guidance and support from teachers and parents. The table also shows that 26.7% of students demonstrate a high level of emotional adjustment. These students are able to maintain emotional stability, participate actively in classroom activities, and develop positive relationships with peers and teachers. On the other hand, 28.9% of students fall under the low emotional adjustment category. These students experience difficulties in managing emotions, social interaction, and classroom participation. Such students may exhibit behaviours such as withdrawal, anxiety, frustration, or lack of confidence.

The results indicate that although inclusive education provides opportunities for emotional and social interaction, a considerable number of students still face challenges in emotional adjustment.

Table 2: Mean and Standard Deviation of Emotional Adjustment Scores

Variable	N	Mean	Standard Deviation
Emotional Adjustment Score	45	52.4	8.6

Interpretation

Table 2 presents the mean and standard deviation of emotional adjustment scores among children with special needs. The mean score of 52.4 indicates the overall average level of emotional adjustment among the students. This suggests that most students demonstrate a moderate level of emotional adjustment in inclusive classroom environments. The standard deviation of 8.6 indicates a moderate variation in emotional adjustment scores among students. This variation may be attributed to several factors such as:

- Type of disability
- Individual personality traits
- Peer interaction

- Teacher support
- Family background

Students receiving strong emotional and social support from teachers and peers tend to show higher emotional adjustment scores compared to those who experience social isolation or lack of support.

Table 3: Emotional Adjustment According to Type of Disability

Type of Disability	Number of Students	Mean Score	Interpretation
Intellectual Disability	20	49.3	Moderate adjustment
Learning Disability	15	54.1	Moderate to high adjustment
Hearing Impairment	10	56.2	High adjustment

Interpretation

Table 3 shows the emotional adjustment levels of students with different types of disabilities. Students with hearing impairment show relatively higher emotional adjustment scores (Mean = 56.2) compared to students with intellectual disabilities. This may be because hearing-impaired students often possess stronger cognitive abilities and are able to adapt socially within inclusive classroom settings when communication support is available. Students with learning disabilities show moderate to high emotional adjustment levels (Mean = 54.1). These students often benefit from peer support and inclusive teaching strategies, which help them develop confidence and emotional stability. However, students with intellectual disabilities show relatively lower emotional adjustment scores (Mean = 49.3). These students may face greater challenges in understanding social cues, managing emotions, and adapting to classroom expectations.

This finding suggests that children with intellectual disabilities require additional emotional support, individualized instruction, and counselling services to improve their emotional adjustment in inclusive schools.

Findings

From the analysis of the collected data, the following findings were observed:

- Most children with special needs demonstrate moderate emotional adjustment in inclusive schools.
- A smaller proportion of students show high emotional adjustment, indicating successful social integration.
- A significant number of students still experience emotional difficulties, highlighting the need for additional support.
- Emotional adjustment varies depending on type of disability and support systems available in the school environment.
- Teacher support, peer acceptance, and inclusive teaching practices play an important role in improving emotional well-being.

Discussion

The present study examined the emotional adjustment of children with special needs studying in inclusive school environments. The findings of the study indicate that most children with special needs demonstrate moderate levels of emotional adjustment, while a smaller proportion of students exhibit high emotional adjustment and some experience difficulties in managing their emotions and social interactions.

The results of the study suggest that inclusive education provides opportunities for children with special needs to interact with their peers without disabilities, which contributes positively to their emotional and social development. Regular interaction with peers helps children develop communication skills, emotional understanding, and a sense of belonging within the school

community. This finding is consistent with the view that inclusive education promotes social participation and emotional well-being among students with disabilities (Ainscow & Miles, 2008). The study also found that a significant number of children experience moderate emotional adjustment, indicating that while inclusive schools offer supportive environments, children with special needs may still encounter emotional challenges such as anxiety, low self-confidence, and difficulty adapting to classroom expectations. These challenges may arise due to differences in learning abilities, communication barriers, and occasional social exclusion. Previous research has also reported that children with disabilities often face emotional and social adjustment difficulties within mainstream educational settings if adequate support systems are not available (Avramidis & Norwich, 2002). The analysis of emotional adjustment based on type of disability revealed that students with hearing impairment demonstrated relatively higher emotional adjustment compared to students with intellectual disabilities. This may be attributed to the fact that hearing-impaired students generally possess average intellectual functioning and can adapt to social environments when communication support is provided. In contrast, children with intellectual disabilities may require additional guidance and support to develop emotional regulation and social skills. Similar findings were reported by Hallahan, Kauffman, and Pullen (2015), who emphasized that children with intellectual disabilities often experience greater challenges in emotional and social adaptation due to cognitive limitations. Another important finding of the study is that teacher support and peer acceptance play a crucial role in enhancing the emotional adjustment of children with special needs. Teachers who adopt inclusive teaching practices and create supportive classroom environments can significantly influence students' emotional development. Encouraging cooperation, empathy, and peer support within the classroom can reduce feelings of isolation among children with disabilities. Sharma, Loreman, and Forlin (2012) emphasized that positive teacher attitudes and inclusive classroom practices contribute greatly to the emotional and social integration of students with special needs.

Furthermore, the findings highlight the importance of developing supportive educational environments that address both the academic and emotional needs of students with disabilities. Inclusive schools that provide counselling services, individualized instruction, and collaborative learning opportunities are more likely to promote emotional stability and self-confidence among children with special needs. According to Santrock (2011), emotional adjustment is closely related to social acceptance and positive interpersonal relationships within educational settings. The findings of the present study are also supported by the principles of inclusive education promoted in international educational frameworks. The Salamanca Statement emphasizes that inclusive schools should provide supportive environments that promote the academic, social, and emotional development of all learners, including those with disabilities (UNESCO, 1994). When inclusive practices are effectively implemented, students with special needs can develop stronger emotional resilience and positive self-concepts.

Overall, the discussion indicates that inclusive education plays a significant role in improving the emotional adjustment of children with special needs. However, the effectiveness of inclusive education largely depends on the availability of appropriate support systems such as trained teachers, supportive peer relationships, and adequate educational resources. Strengthening these factors can help create more inclusive and emotionally supportive learning environments for children with special needs.

Conclusion

This study examines the emotional adjustment of children with special needs in inclusive schools. While most students show moderate adjustment—benefiting from peer interaction and a sense of belonging—many still face challenges like anxiety and low self-confidence due to learning or social barriers.

Key findings indicate that adjustment levels vary by disability type, with students having hearing or learning disabilities often fare better than those with intellectual disabilities. The research underscores that teacher attitudes, peer support, and family involvement are critical. To succeed, schools must move beyond academics to provide counselling, teacher training, and empathetic environments that foster emotional resilience and social integration.

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