

## CREATING A SUPPORTIVE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT: A CASE STUDY ON IMPLEMENTING INCLUSIVE PRACTICES FOR STUDENT OF DETERMINATION IN FORMAL EDUCATION SETTINGS

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### ABSTRACT

*Inclusive education has become a cornerstone of modern educational philosophy, emphasizing the importance of accommodating the diverse needs of all learners, including those with disorders. This research paper presents a case study that explores the implementation of inclusive practices aimed at fostering a supportive learning environment for students of determination within formal education settings. However, the effective implementation of inclusive practices remains a significant challenge for educators worldwide. This study delves into the experiences of educators, students, and other stakeholders involved in the process of creating and sustaining a supportive learning environment for students of determination. Through qualitative research methods, including interviews, observations, and document analysis, the study investigates the strategies, challenges, and successes encountered in the implementation of inclusive practices. The findings contribute to the existing body of knowledge on inclusive education by providing insights into practical approaches for promoting inclusivity and supporting the diverse learning needs of students of determination in formal education settings. Ultimately, this research aims to inform policymakers, educators, and other stakeholders about the importance of inclusive practices and provide evidence-based recommendations for fostering supportive learning environments that cater to the needs of all students.*

**Keywords:** *Autism Spectrum Disorder, students of determination, inclusion, formal institution, perception, case study*

### INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the discourse surrounding inclusive education has garnered significant attention within the field of special educational needs (SEN). The call for inclusive practices has emphasized the need for educational environments that accommodate the diverse needs of all learners, including those with disorders or exceptionalities. Central to this discourse is the concept of creating supportive learning environments that foster the holistic development and academic success of every student, regardless of their individual abilities or challenges.

This case study seeks to explore the implementation of inclusive practices within formal education settings, specifically focusing on students of determination—a term used to describe individuals with diverse learning needs, including those with disorders, special educational

needs, and giftedness. By examining the strategies, interventions, and approaches employed in fostering inclusivity, this study aims to shed light on the efficacy of such practices in enhancing the educational experiences and outcomes of students of determination.

Through a comprehensive analysis of a specific case study, this research endeavours to uncover the intricacies involved in creating and sustaining a supportive learning environment that prioritizes the needs and rights of all students. By elucidating the challenges, successes, and lessons learned from this implementation process, this study seeks to contribute to the ongoing dialogue surrounding inclusive education and provide valuable insights for educators, policymakers, and stakeholders invested in promoting equity and access in education.

Thus, this introduction sets the stage for a detailed examination of inclusive practices within formal education settings, with a particular focus on their impact on students of determination. Through this research endeavour, we aim to not only advance our understanding of inclusive education but also advocate for the creation of educational environments that embrace diversity, foster belongingness, and empower every student to thrive academically and socially.

## **REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

Inclusive education has gained significant attention in recent years as educators strive to create learning environments that cater to the diverse needs of all students, including those with special educational needs (SEN) or "students of determination." This literature review examines current research on implementing inclusive practices to foster a supportive learning environment for students of determination within formal education settings.

Inclusive education emphasizes the provision of appropriate accommodations, support services, and learning opportunities to ensure the participation and success of all students within mainstream educational settings (UNESCO, 2020). Central to this approach is the belief that diversity enriches the learning environment and that every student has the right to access quality education tailored to their individual needs (Salend, 2016). Creating a supportive learning environment involves not only physical accessibility but also the provision of appropriate academic, social, and emotional support to meet the unique needs of students of determination (Avramidis & Norwich, 2002).

Teacher attitudes play a crucial role in the successful implementation of inclusive practices (Forlin et al., 2011). Positive attitudes towards diversity and a willingness to adapt teaching methods are essential for creating an inclusive classroom environment (Sharma et al., 2019). However, research suggests that many educators lack adequate training and support in implementing inclusive practices effectively (Ruijs & Peetsma, 2009). Professional development programs focusing on inclusive education have been shown to improve teacher efficacy and confidence in catering to the needs of students of determination (Alzyoudi & Al-Mandil, 2019).

Collaborative partnerships between educators, support staff, parents, and external agencies are vital for promoting inclusive education (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011). Involving parents in decision-making processes and providing them with resources and support can enhance their capacity to advocate for their children's educational needs (Sharma et al., 2019). Additionally, partnerships with external support services, such as speech therapists or

occupational therapists, can provide valuable resources and expertise to address the diverse needs of students of determination (Avramidis & Norwich, 2002).

Creating a supportive learning environment for students of determination requires a multifaceted approach that addresses teacher attitudes, professional development, collaborative partnerships, and the implementation of inclusive practices such as individualized and customized learning plans. By integrating evidence-based strategies and fostering a culture of inclusivity, formal education settings can better meet the diverse needs of all students, thereby promoting academic success and social inclusion.

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

Creating a supportive learning environment is crucial for the academic, social, and emotional development of all students, including those identified as students of determination. Students of determination encompass a diverse group with varying needs, including those with disorders, learning difficulties, and special educational needs (SEN). Inclusive education practices aim to address the diverse needs of all students, ensuring equitable access to education and promoting their active participation in learning activities.

The theoretical framework guiding this study draws upon several key theories and frameworks within the field of special education and inclusive education. The Social Model of Disability emphasizes the role of society in creating barriers for individuals with disorders, rather than viewing disability as solely a medical issue. By addressing environmental and attitudinal barriers, inclusive practices aim to promote the full participation and inclusion of students of determination in educational settings (Oliver, 1996).

Ecological Systems Theory, proposed by Bronfenbrenner (1979), emphasizes the importance of understanding the interactions between individuals and their environments. In the context of inclusive education, this theory highlights the need to consider multiple levels of influence, including the individual, classroom, school, and broader societal factors, in creating supportive learning environments for students of determination.

Collaborative problem-solving involves collaboration among educators, parents, and relevant stakeholders to address the individualized needs of students of determination. By fostering partnerships and shared decision-making, this approach supports the implementation of tailored interventions and support strategies that promote the academic and social inclusion of students with diverse needs (Abery et al., 2019).

The theoretical framework outlined above provides a comprehensive lens through which to examine the implementation of inclusive practices for students of determination in formal education settings. By integrating principles from the Social Model of Disability, UDL, Ecological Systems Theory, and collaborative problem-solving approaches, this study aims to explore the multifaceted factors influencing the creation of supportive learning environments and identify effective strategies for promoting the inclusion and success of students of determination.

## METHODOLOGY

For the study, case study design and interview schedules were constructed. Two students of determination's data were collected through in-depth interviews. Information regarding the socio-demographic details of the participants including age, gender, education, religion and locality was collected.

**Table 1: Demographic Profile of Participants**

<b>Case study participant</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Grade/standard</b>	<b>Identified disorder</b>
<b>Case Study .1</b>	Male	5	Kindergarten-2	Autism Spectrum Disorder
<b>Case Study .2</b>	Male	7	Grade 2	Autism Spectrum Disorder

## CASE ANALYSIS

As shown in Table 1, case studies were conducted upon the mentioned two students, inclusion support was provided in school and a follow up at home, wherein their parents were interviewed.

### Case Study Number 1

The student is from Grade 2. When he first joined our school in Grade 1, his parents found it challenging to accept his condition. He faced difficulties in the classroom – he wasn't interested in learning, had trouble sitting properly, and often seemed distracted. He preferred lying down, playing with his ID card, and communicating primarily in Hindi. Recognizing these challenges, our Inclusion Department, in collaboration with dedicated teachers, held parental counselling sessions, to help his parents understand his condition.

### Assessment and Diagnosis

After observation and multiple meetings with Supervisor and Class teacher along with the Inclusion team, his parents eventually sought an assessment, leading to the diagnosis of Autism. In response, he was suggested to have a Learning Support Assistant. An Individual Education Plan (IEP) was developed, and he was exempted from studying a third language to allow us to provide more tailored support.

### Intervention

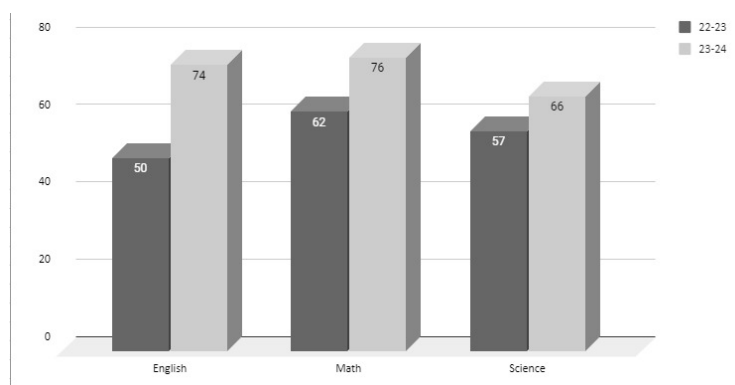
During the intervention, a comprehensive approach was employed to support the student's learning and behavioural needs within the classroom setting. Visual aids, including picture schedules, visual timers, and instructions, were utilised to enhance the student's understanding

of classroom routines and expectations. Additionally, efforts were made to create a sensory-friendly environment by minimising distractions, providing quiet spaces, and offering sensory tools such as fidget toys and weighted blankets. A structured daily routine with clear transition between activities was established to promote predictability and minimise anxiety. Positive reinforcement strategies, including praise, rewards, and token systems, were implemented to motivate the student and reinforce desired behaviours effectively. Modified instruction and learning materials were tailored to the student's learning styles, incorporating hands-on activities, visual aids, and interactive lessons to enhance engagement and accessibility. Social skills development was facilitated through structured activities, role-playing, and peer interactions, with explicit instruction on social cues, turn-taking, and communication skills. Furthermore, life skills sessions, including yoga, money management, and time management, were integrated into the intervention plan to foster holistic development. Buddy support was provided to enhance social skills, while exam accommodations, such as modified question papers, extra time, and separate testing with an adult prompter, were implemented to ensure equitable assessment opportunities. Positive parent involvement was fostered through regular meetings to discuss progress and address any challenges encountered during the intervention process.

### Academic Progress

With collaborative efforts from the Inclusion Department, teachers, parents, and the LSA, we provided intensive support which made him make significant progress in his education. He developed independent skills, improved his eye contact, and began communicating in English. He also found his unique way of presenting and expressing himself, which reflected his growth and increased confidence. His remarkable progress led to his appointment as the classroom monitor and a role as a sustainable leader.

His commitment to his education was evident as he received a 100% attendance award twice in consecutive months. He also demonstrated his artistic talents, actively participating in art competitions and programs.



**Figure 1: The academic performance of the student in two consecutive academic years**

## **Social Development**

Throughout the student's journey, a discernible shift from tentative participation to active engagement within the classroom environment is evident, indicative of burgeoning social adeptness. Within this supportive milieu, the student gradually developed confidence in expressing oneself and contributing to collaborative endeavours, thereby nurturing a sense of belonging and self-assurance.

By actively participating in group discussions and collaborative projects, the student not only hones essential social competencies but also enriches cognitive development through peer interaction and shared learning experiences. Through the provision of a supportive and inclusive learning environment, inclusive education serves as a catalyst for fostering social growth, nurturing meaningful relationships, and promoting holistic development in the student.

## **Case Study Number 2**

The student is from KG 2. When he first entered KG 1, he faced challenges that made it difficult for him to sit still and focus on the classroom activities. These challenges raised concerns about his well-being and education, prompting the intervention of the Inclusion support team.

## **Initial Challenges and Parental Involvement**

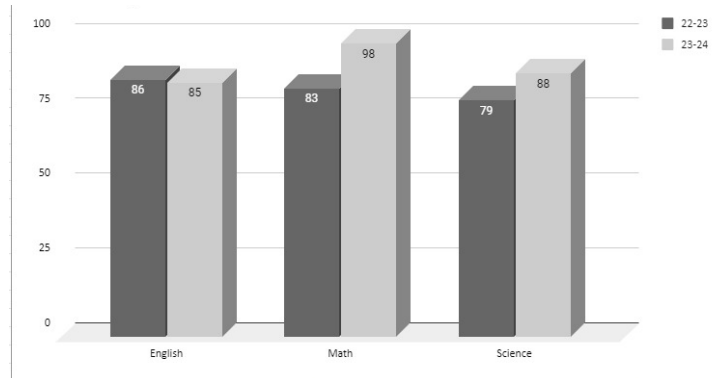
It was evident that the student had difficulties adapting to the classroom environment. He struggled with maintaining his seat, had trouble focusing, and often seemed restless. Recognizing these challenges, we initiated open and constructive discussions with his parents. Initially, they faced some difficulty accepting his situation. It took multiple meetings, heartfelt discussions, and educational guidance to help them come to terms with his condition. The cooperation and support from his parents played a pivotal role in his development.

## **Assessment and Diagnosis**

A significant turning point in his journey was his assessment, which resulted in a diagnosis of Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). It is essential to highlight that his intelligence remained unaffected by his condition, and there were no specific educational concerns. This diagnosis enabled our Inclusion Department and teachers to tailor their approach to suit his unique needs.

## **Academic Progress**

Through close observation and interaction with the student, we discovered something truly special—his exceptional talent for mathematics. Armed with this insight, we began providing him with tailored worksheets and support to nurture his potential. The results have been impressive. He not only improved his seating tolerance but also displayed increased attention and focus on the classroom. He now actively participates in class programs and interacts with his peers, marking a significant transformation from his earlier behaviour.



**Figure 2: The academic performance of the student (Case Study Number 2) in two consecutive academic years**

### **Social Growth**

One of the most heart-warming aspects of his journey has been his improved social development. He has transitioned from being isolated and non-interactive to making friends and forming meaningful connections with his peers. This transformation underlines the power of inclusive education in fostering social growth.

### **Summer Camp Success**

During our school's summer camp, he demonstrated remarkable progress. He completed tasks and activities without his Learning Support Assistant (LSA). His independence and confidence were truly inspiring.

### **Gifted and Talented Program**

The student has earned a well-deserved place on our school's Gifted and Talented list for mathematics. This recognition reflects his exceptional abilities and the nurturing environment provided by our school.

The student's journey stands as a shining example of the positive impact of inclusive education and the dedicated support of his parents, teachers, and our Inclusion Department. His success story is a reminder that, with the right guidance and support, every child, regardless of their challenges, can flourish and excel in an educational setting.

### **DISCUSSION**

In recent years, there has been a growing recognition of the importance of creating inclusive learning environments for students of determination in formal education settings. This research paper aims to explore the key components of creating a supportive learning environment for these students, focusing on the roles of parents, peers, and teachers.

## **Role of Teachers**

The approach adopted by teachers stands at the core of creating a supportive learning environment for student of determination. Teachers play a pivotal role in cultivating inclusive classroom environments. Educators must embrace a proactive and inclusive stance that acknowledges and accommodates the diverse needs and abilities of all students. By catering to diverse learners' needs, teachers can foster equity and enhance student outcomes. Our study underscores the importance of professional development initiatives, drawing from research by Darling-Hammond and Richardson (2009), which emphasizes the imperative of equipping teachers with the necessary skills and knowledge to implement inclusive practices effectively. Research indicates that inclusive teaching methodologies like differentiated instruction, universal design for learning (UDL), and positive behaviour support are instrumental in catering to the needs of students with disabilities in mainstream classrooms (Boyle & Topping, 2012; Mastropieri & Scruggs, 2010). Through collaborative efforts and differentiated instruction, educators can create inclusive spaces where all students feel valued and supported in their learning journey. Furthermore, teacher attitudes, beliefs, and expectations wield substantial influence in shaping the educational experiences and outcomes of students with disabilities (Soodak & Erwin, 2000). By fostering a nurturing and inclusive classroom ethos, teachers can cultivate an environment where all students feel valued, respected, and empowered to excel.

## **Role of the parents**

Parents play a crucial role in supporting the education of students of determination. Their involvement, advocacy, and collaboration with educators are essential for ensuring that the unique needs of their children are addressed effectively. Research by Turnbull et al. (2007) emphasizes the importance of family-school partnerships in promoting positive outcomes for students with disabilities. Research by scholars such as Turnbull et al. (2016) emphasizes the significance of familial support in promoting the well-being and success of these students. When parents embrace their child's unique abilities and challenges, it not only bolsters the child's self-esteem but also sets the stage for acceptance and understanding in broader social contexts. Studies have shown that parental acceptance contributes significantly to the development of positive self-identity and resilience in students with diverse needs (Shogren et al., 2016). By actively engaging parents in the educational process, educators can gain valuable insights into the strengths, preferences, and challenges of their students, allowing for more personalized and effective support strategies. Moreover, the emotional and practical support provided by parents can significantly impact students' self-esteem, motivation, and overall well-being (Hartas, 2011). Therefore, fostering strong partnerships between parents and educators is essential for creating a supportive learning environment for students of determination.

## **Role of Peers**

Peers in an inclusive education have an important role in supporting social and emotional development of students of determination. Research suggests that fostering positive peer interactions contributes to heightened social inclusion, acceptance, and self-confidence among students with disabilities (Carter et al., 2009). Through positive peer interactions, students can



develop empathy, acceptance, and a sense of belonging, which are essential components of inclusive education. By fostering a culture of inclusion among peers, schools can enhance the overall educational experience for all students, regardless of their backgrounds or abilities. Peers often serve as role models, mentors, and allies, aiding in the seamless integration of students with disabilities into classroom dynamics and social circles (Giangreco et al., 2001). Furthermore, peer support initiatives such as buddy support enhance academic engagement and achievement among students with disabilities. Hence, creating avenues for meaningful peer interactions and cultivating a culture of acceptance and inclusivity within the classroom are pivotal in fostering the well-being and academic prowess of students with determination.

## **CONCLUSION**

In conclusion, the implementation of inclusive practices within formal education settings is pivotal in fostering a supportive learning environment for students of determination. Through our case study, we have elucidated the multifaceted benefits of inclusive education, including enhanced academic outcomes, social integration, and personal development for all learners. By prioritising individualised support, adaptive curriculum design, and collaborative partnerships between educators, families, and support professionals, we can effectively address the diverse needs of students of determination and create an environment where every learner can thrive. However, it is imperative to acknowledge the ongoing challenges and barriers to inclusive education, such as resource constraints, attitudinal barriers, and systemic inequities, which require sustained efforts and commitment from all stakeholders to overcome. Moving forward, continued research, advocacy, and policy initiatives are essential to advance the cause of inclusive education and ensure that every student, regardless of ability, has equitable access to quality education and opportunities for success.

## **LIMITATION OF THE STUDY**

The research paper primarily focuses on specific case study regarding the implementation of inclusive practices for student of determination within a formal setting which does not fully capture the diversity of challenges present in other environments. The small sample size limits the findings about the student of determination in various other settings. External factors such as policy changes, societal attitudes, or economic conditions are not adequately discussed in the analysis.

## **SUGGESTIVE MEASURES FOR FUTURE INTERVENTION**

Based on the findings of this study, several recommendations can be made to create an inclusive learning environment. Firstly, it is important to evaluate the effectiveness of various teacher training and continuous professional development programs in enhancing educators' knowledge and skills to implement inclusive practices in school. This will help teachers to effectively support the diverse needs of Students of Determination in inclusive classroom settings. Secondly explore the importance of technology like assistive technologies and digital learning platforms in facilitating access to inclusive education. This will also investigate how technology can be effectively integrated into the classroom to promote active learning and

engagement among students of determination. Additionally, the study suggests to implement supportive programs aimed at assisting parents who face challenges in caring for their children with disorders, particularly those with low incomes who may struggle to access necessary resources. Furthermore, investigate the role of parents and caregivers in fostering a supportive learning environment for students of determination and strategies for enhancing collaboration between schools, families, and community organisations to promote inclusive education and support the holistic development of students of determination.

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