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EDITORIAL

We are pleased to present the latest issue of *Indian Educational Researcher, Volume 13, Issue 2 (July – December 2020)*, which showcases a diverse range of research studies and conceptual analyses addressing key areas in contemporary education. This issue reflects the dynamic nature of the educational landscape and the need for continuous exploration of innovative teaching practices, inclusive strategies, and societal responsibilities of educators.

Mrs. Annapriya J., in her article *"Building Empathy and Effective Listening Skills in Teacher Education"*, emphasizes the importance of interpersonal competencies in teacher training. By fostering empathy and active listening, educators can create classrooms that are not only academically effective but also emotionally supportive, promoting holistic development among students.

Ms. Steny Thomas and Dr. K. Mangai, through *"Environmental Awareness"*, underscore the urgent need for environmental literacy in higher education. Their study demonstrates how informed and responsible students can act as catalysts for sustainable practices in their communities, reflecting the global imperative of environmental conservation.

Dr. Annie Kavitha L., in *"Inclusive Education: Bridging Diversity and Learning"*, provides insights into strategies for accommodating learner diversity. Her work highlights the importance of equitable educational practices, helping institutions to cultivate inclusive learning environments that respect the unique abilities, backgrounds, and needs of every student.

Dr. Sr. M. Irudhaya Mary's contribution, *"The New Normal and Its Effects on the Teaching and Learning Environment"*, explores the evolving challenges posed by unprecedented changes in education, particularly in light of technological integration and adaptive pedagogical strategies. Her findings emphasize the need for flexibility, resilience, and innovation among educators and learners alike.

This issue collectively emphasizes several critical themes: the development of social and emotional skills among teachers, the promotion of environmental responsibility, the creation of inclusive learning spaces, and the adaptation to emerging educational contexts.

Each article not only contributes to the academic discourse but also provides actionable insights for teacher educators, policymakers, and institutions striving to enhance educational quality and student outcomes.

We believe that the contributions presented in this volume will inspire further research, reflection, and innovation in the field of education. By bridging theory and practice, this issue aims to empower educators and students to meet the demands of a rapidly changing world while fostering ethical, inclusive, and sustainable practices.

Editorial Board

Review Article

Building Empathy and Effective Listening Skills in Teacher Education

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Abstract

Empathy and effective listening are essential competencies in teacher education, influencing classroom communication, inclusivity, and student wellbeing. This study investigates the importance of these interpersonal skills, outlines strategies for their development in teacher education programs, and discusses implications for professional practice. Using a qualitative review of literature and theoretical frameworks, the article highlights the transformative role of empathy-driven pedagogy in shaping reflective, compassionate, and effective teachers for the 21st century. Additionally, a conceptual framework is presented to visually map the relationship between empathy, listening, teacher education programs, and student-centered outcomes.

Keywords: Empathy, Effective Listening, Teacher Education, Interpersonal Skills, Student Wellbeing, Reflective Practice

Introduction

In today's rapidly changing educational landscape, teachers are increasingly required to fulfil multifaceted roles that extend beyond the delivery of academic content. They serve as mentors, guides, and facilitators of holistic student development. Among the most crucial skills that define successful teaching are empathy and effective listening. These interpersonal competencies allow educators to perceive students' emotions, understand their challenges, and respond with compassion and clarity. Such skills create classrooms where students feel valued, respected, and motivated to learn.

Background of the Study

Education in the 21st century prioritizes the holistic growth of learners over mere academic achievement. Teachers are now expected to go beyond content delivery by modelling social and emotional competencies. Empathy and effective listening play a vital role in fostering supportive teacher–student relationships, creating a positive classroom climate that enhances both learning and emotional well-being.

Research Gap and Rationale

Teacher education has largely focused on content and pedagogy, with limited attention to interpersonal dimensions like empathy and active listening. These skills are essential for building positive teacher–student relationships, promoting inclusivity, and meeting diverse learner needs. This study addresses the gap by examining empathy and listening as core elements of effective teacher preparation.

Scope and Significance of the Study

The present study emphasizes the critical role of teacher education in nurturing empathetic and attentive professionals capable of addressing both academic and emotional needs of students. By focusing on empathy and effective listening, the study underlines essential skills that contribute to building stronger teacher–student relationships. In a multicultural and multilingual context like India, these competencies become particularly significant in bridging communication gaps and fostering inclusive learning environments. The findings are expected to guide teacher educators in designing training modules that promote emotional intelligence alongside pedagogical knowledge. Overall, the study contributes to the broader discourse on improving teacher education programs to create reflective, compassionate, and responsive educators.

Literature Review

Empathy, as defined by Rogers (1959), involves perceiving another's perspective and emotions without judgment, and in classrooms, it facilitates stronger bonds and inclusive

learning. Brownell's (2012) HURIER model—Hearing, Understanding, Remembering, Interpreting, Evaluating, and responding—demonstrates how listening can be systematically taught and applied in pedagogical contexts. Teachers who actively practice empathy and effective listening are shown to build trust and rapport with students, thereby reducing anxiety and enhancing classroom engagement. Previous research highlights that empathy predicts positive classroom management while listening improves the clarity of communication and overall learning outcomes (Cornelius-White, 2007). However, despite this evidence, few teacher education programs integrate structured modules on empathy and listening, which limits their development as measurable competencies.

3. Objectives of the Study

1. To examine the theoretical foundations of empathy and effective listening in educational contexts.

2. To explore the role of empathy and listening skills in enhancing teacher-student relationships and classroom dynamics.

3. To identify strategies for embedding empathy and listening skill development in teacher education programs.

4. To discuss challenges in fostering and assessing these skills within higher education institutions.

5. To present a conceptual framework linking empathy and listening with outcomes in teacher education.

Methodology

The study employs a qualitative research design, using conceptual analysis and a thematic literature review to explore empathy and effective listening in teacher education. Secondary data were collected from peer-reviewed journals, books, policy documents, and teacher education reports indexed in SCOPUS and UGC-CARE. Thematic analysis was applied, categorizing data into key themes such as empathy, listening, teacher–student relationships, teacher reflection, and program design. These themes were synthesized to develop the proposed conceptual framework for enhancing teacher education practices. However, as the study relies solely on secondary data without primary empirical evidence, the findings may have limited contextual generalization.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework (Figure 1) illustrates the relationship between empathy, effective listening, and teacher education programs, highlighting how these core competencies influence outcomes such as student wellbeing, inclusive classrooms, and reflective professional growth.

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework linking Empathy, Effective Listening, and Teacher Education Outcomes

Conceptual Framework: Empathy and Listening in Teacher Education
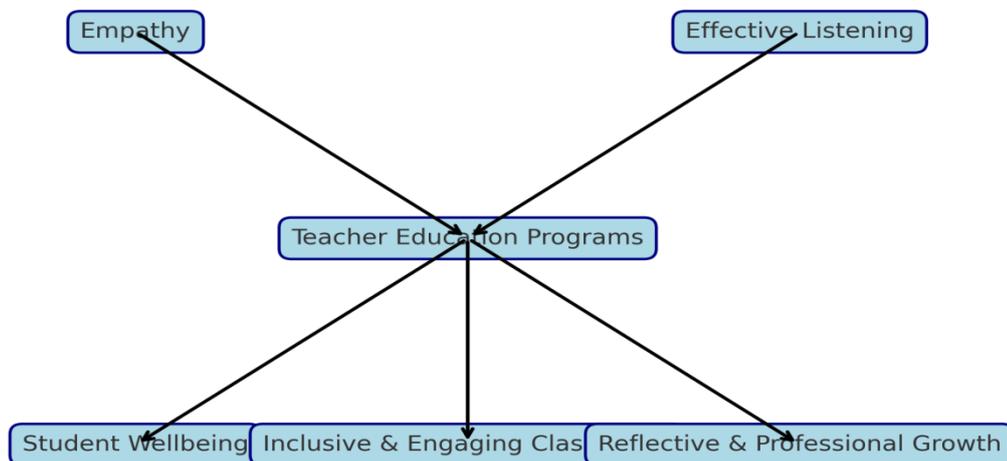
Results and Findings

The review of literature and conceptual mapping yielded the following insights:

a. Classroom Management and Trust-Building

Empathetic listening creates a respectful classroom environment where students feel understood. By addressing concerns patiently, teachers minimize conflicts and reduce behavioral issues. This trust-based approach enhances classroom discipline without relying solely on authority.

b. Inclusivity and Equity in Teaching Practices

Teachers who actively listen can better recognize the diverse backgrounds and needs of learners. Empathy allows them to adapt strategies that ensure equal opportunities for marginalized or less vocal students. As a result, inclusivity becomes an integral part of daily teaching practices.

c. Student Engagement and Motivation

When teachers listen attentively, students feel valued and supported in their learning journey. This validation boosts their confidence and encourages greater participation in classroom discussions. Over time, empathetic listening fosters sustained motivation and positive attitudes toward learning.

d. Early Identification of Mental Health Needs

Empathetic teachers are sensitive to subtle behavioral or emotional changes in students. Listening carefully helps in identifying early signs of stress, anxiety, or disengagement. This awareness enables timely intervention, contributing to the promotion of student well-being.

e. Teacher Reflection and Professional Growth

Listening with empathy also benefits teachers by deepening their self-awareness. It encourages them to reflect on classroom practices, communication styles, and areas needing improvement. Such reflective practice leads to continuous professional growth and more effective pedagogy.

Discussion

a. Interpretation of Findings

The findings indicate that empathy and listening are not merely interpersonal traits but powerful pedagogical tools. Teachers who apply these skills foster trust, reduce anxiety, and enhance classroom participation.

b. Cultural Dimensions of Empathy and Listening

In multicultural contexts like India, empathy and listening require cultural sensitivity. Teachers must adapt to diverse linguistic, social, and cultural backgrounds to build inclusive and respectful learning environments.

c. Challenges in Integrating Empathy and Listening in Teacher Education

Integrating empathy and listening faces challenges such as limited assessment methods, curriculum overload focused on cognitive outcomes, and resistance from traditional teaching approaches.

d. Assessment and Evaluation of Soft Skills

Rubrics, reflective journals, and peer feedback provide effective means to assess empathy and listening. These tools emphasize growth and self-awareness rather than rigid evaluation.

e. Implications for Curriculum Design

Teacher education should embed experiential strategies like role play, case studies, and reflective discussions. Such approaches ensure that empathy and listening are practiced as core professional skills.

Implications and Recommendations

a. Implications for Teacher Educators

Teacher educators must model empathetic listening in their teaching practices to demonstrate its classroom value. Practical strategies like role-play and reflective discussions can help trainees internalize these skills. This approach fosters a culture of inclusivity and respect within teacher education institutions.

b. Implications for Policy Makers

Policy frameworks such as NEP 2020 should explicitly embed empathy and listening in teacher training curricula. Clear guidelines and assessment rubrics can ensure consistency across institutions. Policies linking these skills with accreditation will elevate their importance in professional readiness.

c. Recommendations for Teacher Training Programs

Teacher training must treat empathy and listening as core competencies rather than optional attributes. Structured workshops, mentorship, and peer-feedback can strengthen soft skills. Cross-disciplinary collaborations can further enrich training and improve teacher preparedness.

d. Recommendations for Future Research

More empirical studies are needed to assess the impact of empathy and listening on student outcomes. Longitudinal research can examine how teachers sustain these practices over time. Comparative studies across cultures may provide global insights into their effectiveness.

Conclusion

Empathy and effective listening are central pillars of effective teaching and must be treated as core competencies in teacher education. Their integration ensures that educators can engage with students on cognitive and emotional levels, building strong teacher-student relationships that underpin academic success and holistic wellbeing. The conceptual framework presented here underscores their transformative role in teacher preparation. Future research should include empirical studies measuring the impact of empathy-based training and developing scalable, cross-cultural models for global application.

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Descriptive Article

ENVIRONMENTAL AWARENESS

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Abstract

Environmental awareness is an incredibly important part of our lives. In order to protect the sustainability of the planet, everyone needs to commit to becoming more environmentally aware. The emphasis should be on the teaching people how to think, rather than what to think. Environmental awareness not only implies knowledge about environment but also the attitude, values and necessary skills to solve environmental related problems. People need to learn ways to perceive environmental problems. It is very essential for each individual to develop an awareness of protection and prevention towards the environment. It is imperative that humans implement new ways of thinking and change their current ways of living due to irresistible effects of environmental degradation. It is only the knowledge and understanding that can do this. College students not only study this for themselves but can spread the knowledge and understanding to others in their family, neighborhood etc, which can help to restore degraded environment. So, it was decided to construct an environmental awareness scale for college students. This questionnaire was aimed at uncovering the knowledge and conceptions of college students about the environment and other issues relating to environment. This tool will help to find out environmental literacy and the environmental awareness index of the college students.

Keywords: Environmental Awareness, Sustainability, Conservation, Pollution

Introduction

Environmental awareness means being aware of the natural environment and making choices that benefit the Earth, rather than hurt it. Being environmentally aware mean understanding how our behavior impacts the environment and committing to make changes to

our activities to protect the planet. Some of the ways to practice environmental awareness includes: Using safe and nontoxic building supplies, conserving energy and water, recycling, activism and others. The environmental concern is growing today at greater speed in developing, developed and under developed countries because the consequences of the environmental damages has become apparent and horrifying. While there is a consensus about severity of the environmental degradation taking place worldwide, there is little consensus about what can, and should be done to avert future environment catastrophe. Educating public and creating public awareness is a necessity of success of environment. Population explosion, Urbanization, clear-cutting of forests, depletion of ozone layer, erosion of soil, pollution of water resources, accelerated rate of the extinction of species, destruction of varieties of ecosystems and global warming are few examples of environmental degradation. Beside destructive trend on environment, sluggish improvement on environmental awareness and the initiatives revealed bitter consequences of environment. Knowledge by environmental education was started globally as an effort to protect environment and sustainable development when it was observed to have potential to manage life and to establish a prosperous and peaceful future.

Statement of Problem

Environmental awareness is necessary to know the importance of keeping the environment clean and also protecting the Earth. So, the survey focus on the topic entitled **"Measuring Environmental Awareness level for a sample of college student"**.

Objectives of the Study

➢ The study aims to measure the level of the environmental awareness for a random sample of college students from various specializations.
➢ In addition, the study focuses on identifying the need and steps to increase and disseminate the environmental awareness.

Tool Description

➢ The environmental awareness scale consists of 25 items that are in statement form followed by given alternative responses to each item.

➢ This scale is a 5 points Likert scale. These items seek responses in "Extremely Aware", "Moderately Aware", "Somewhat Aware", "and Slightly Aware" and "Not at all Aware" with scores rewarded as 5, 4, 3, 2 and 1.

➢ The student has to select one response against each statement.

Administration of Survey

➢ The Environmental Awareness questionnaire was created and sent using "Google Forms" to different colleges.

➢ Generally 10 minutes have been found sufficient to deliver the questionnaire.

➢ The necessary instructions to fill the form were given in the "Google Forms".

Report of the Environmental Awareness Survey for College Students

➢ The Environmental Survey Questionnaire prepared by the investigator was sent to different college students in Chennai.

➢ The Questionnaire was sent online using "Google Forms" and a total of 221 responses were received personal variables like Gender; Stream of study; Medium of Instruction; Region; Family Type; Type of College and Socio-Economic status of the students was collected.

Following Are the Percentage of Responses Based On the Personal Variables;

➢ **Gender:** Out of the 221 survey participants 82.8% were female and 17.2% were male.

➢ **Stream of Study:** The students from the streams Education 57.9%; Science 23.1% and Arts 10.9% participated in this survey.

➢ **Medium of Instruction:** 65.2% English medium students and 34.8% Tamil medium students participated in this survey.

➢ **Region:** 55.7% Survey participants were from urban region and 44.3% from rural region.

➢ **Family type:** Most of the participants about 66.5% were from nuclear family.

➢ **Type of college:** Students from private colleges 54.8% and Government aided colleges 39.8% participated in this survey.

➢ **Socio-Economic Status:** Most of the participants belong to Middle Socio-Economic strata.

Following Are the Percentage of Response Based on the Environmental Awareness Questions

➢ **Q1:** We are approaching the limit of number of people the Earth can support.

    ♦ From the response to the statement, it is known that most of the participants, i.e., about 43.9% were extremely aware or at least 25.8%, 15.4% were aware that the Earth is reaching its maximum capacity.

➢ **Q2:** When humans interfere with nature it often produces disastrous consequences

    ♦ Almost half the populations 47.3% were aware of the disastrous consequences of human interference with nature.

➢ **Q3:** Humans are severely abusing the environment.

    ♦ Nearly 3/4th 66.2% were aware that humans are severely abusing the environment.

➢ **Q4:** If things continue on their present course, we will soon experience a major ecological catastrophe.

    ♦ All the participants re aware of the facts that is things continues in the same pace, ruination of nature is unavoidable.

➢ **Q5:** Most storm water drains and road gutters drain directly into stream, river or sea.

    ♦ All the participants are aware of the above fact.

➢ **Q6:** The effects of pollution on public health are worse than we realize.

    ♦ The participants are aware of the ill effects of pollution on people's health.

➢ **Q7:** Tropical rain forests are essential for maintaining healthy planet.

    ♦ Nearly half of the sample population are aware of the above statement and the rest of the population are at least little aware of the same.

➢ **Q8:** Plastic is non-biodegradable.

    ♦ Large percentage of the sample population 68.3% is extremely aware of the above statement.

- ➢ **Q9:** The invasive species like eucalyptus pose threat to the biodiversity of an area and human welfare.
  - ♣ The awareness regarding the invasive species seems to be less among the sample population. Out of which 14.5% are not at all aware about the destruction caused by the invasive species.

- ➢ **Q10:** Hazardous e-waste is produced more and more because humans don't recycle enough or reuse their electronic gadgets in a proper manner.
  - ♣ Nearly 3/4th of the sample populations were aware that we do not follow the 3R principle in case of electronic gadgets.

- ➢ **Q11:** Oil spills frequently kills the marine mammals such as whales, dolphins etc.
  - ♣ Nearly 80% of the sample population had a good awareness about oil spills and its ill effects.

- ➢ **Q12:** Sea level has risen because of global warming.
  - ♣ Nearly 90% of the sample populations are very well aware about the sea level rising due to global warming.

- ➢ **Q13:** The main cause of increasing air pollution is exhaust from vehicle overuse.
  - ♣ Nearly 63.3% of the sample populations were extremely aware about the consequence from vehicle overuse.

- ➢ **Q14:** CFCs emitted from AC and refrigerators is causing ozone depletion.
  - ♣ Nearly 85% of the sample populations had good awareness about ozone depletion and its causes.

- ➢ **Q15:** Crop rotation helps return nutrients to soil without synthetic inputs.
  - ♣ There was good awareness about crop rotation practices and its uses.

- ➢ **Q16:** Mining processes cause erosion, loss of biodiversity and contamination of soil, ground water and surface water.

      About 89% of the sample populations had awareness about mining process and its effect on soil. Out of these 89%, 39.8% of sample populations were extremely aware of the same.

- **Q17:** Eutrophication occurs due to nitrogen pollutants runoff agricultural lands.
  - 9% of the sample populations were not at all aware of what Eutrophication is and 33% were extremely aware.

- **Q18:** Vermicomposting is a low cost, effective biological method for waste management in which microbes assist earth worms in waste degradation.
  - More than 85% of the sample populations were aware of the preparation of organic manure from waste whereas rest of the population was not aware of the same.

- **Q19:** Radioactive waste is a result of many activities including nuclear medicine, nuclear research, nuclear power generation, rare-earth mining and nuclear weapons reprocessing.
  - Nearly 16.7% of the sample populations were ignorant about the hazardous radioactive wastes, and the rest of the populations had less awareness of the same.

- **Q20:** Growing population and its demands disrupt the ecological balance.
  - 46.2% of the sample populations were extremely aware that the growing population will also lead to growing demands and will exert pressure on the ecology for their basic needs like food and shelter, which in turn will disrupt the ecological balance.

- **Q21:** The loss of trees and other vegetation can cause climate change, desertification, soil erosion, fewer crops, flooding, increased greenhouse gases in the atmosphere etc.
  - More than half of the populations 62% were extremely aware about the ill effects caused by deforestation.

- **Q22:** Planting trees improve air quality, reduce noise pollution and reduce the amount of storm water runoff.
  - Nearly 89% populations were aware of positive outcome of planting trees in the environment and only few were ignorant of this fact.

➢ **Q23:** The usage of cleaner and efficient renewable energy sources like solar panels build communities that are sustainable.

   ♦ Nearly 85% of the populations had a good awareness that alternative energy resources can bring about the sustainable development.

➢ **Q24:** Fish, sea birds, sea turtles and marine mammals become entangled in or ingest plastic debris, causing suffocation, starvation and drowning.

   ♦ Nearly 7.2% of the sample populations were not at all aware of how the human activities damage the ocean ecosystems.

➢ **Q25:** Coral reefs are dying due to damaging activities like coral mining, pollution, over fishing etc.

   ♦ Nearly 10.4% were not at all aware about the conditions of our coral reefs.

Discussion

From the environmental survey, most students are extremely aware of the following

❖ Human activities are the major cause of the environmental degradation.

❖ Growing population disrupts balance i.e., ecological balance and affects its carrying capacity.

❖ If humans continue to abuse environment, we will soon experience major ecological catastrophe.

❖ Effects of human activities like usage of plastics, production of e-waste, oil spills, over use of vehicles/ AC/ Refrigerators, mining etc are pollution, global warming, loss of species, ozone depletion, natural disasters etc.

❖ This environment degradation causes health problems to humans, animals and plants.

❖ In order to reverse the effect of environmental degradation, humans need to follow sustainable consumption of resources.

❖ We need to follow healthy practices like the afforestation, follow 3R principle (Reduce, Recycle & Reuse) stop usage of single use plastic, preserve native species, crop rotation, Vermicomposting instead of the synthetic fertilizer, use of alternate cleaner energy resources and stop over-exploitation of all the natural resources.

From the survey result, it is known that few people are ignorant about the following;

- **Invasive Species** - It was noted that some participants are completely unaware of what an invasive species is. This can lead to extensive loss of the indigenous/ native species of a region and can negatively alter the environment.
- **Coral Reefs** - People seems to be very much ignorant about the coral reefs which protects the coastline from the natural calamities and also acts as a source for food and medicine.
- **Damage to Ocean Lives –** Few people were not at all aware how the plastic debris we throw into the ocean is killing marine life.

Implication

- ✓ Environmental awareness helps to see the interconnectedness of human, animals and environment.
- ✓ Environmental awareness encourages us to research, investigate how and why things happen, and make their own decisions about complex environmental issue.
- ✓ By developing and enhancing critical and creative thinking skills, environmental awareness helps foster a new generation of informed consumers, workers, as well as policy or decision makers.
- ✓ Environmental awareness makes people to take responsible action for the betterment of environment.
- ✓ It encourages eco-friendly practices and use of alternative, clean resources and encourages healthier lifestyle.
- ✓ It strengthens the community and reduces the nature deficit disorders.
- ✓ Environmental awareness helps us to attain the sustainable development goals.

Suggestions/Recommendations

Even though the environmental awareness level is fairly good among college students, there is not much enthusiasm in implementing the necessary steps to improve the environment conditions. The awareness alone does not bestow any responsibility on students to protect the environment. Following are few suggestions for the same

- There should be much more to environmental education than just classes that promote environmental awareness and homework that requires some writings. Students should be

given more control over the projects so that it makes them understand the purpose of the environmental protection.

+ Provide outside-class opportunities for students.

+ One of the biggest flaws of the educational system is that the educators are very bad role models when it comes to environmental protection. The teachers must be a role model.

+ Strict environmental legislations.

+ Establishing protected environmental areas which execute the scientific, environmental, and economic and entertainment functions.

+ Encouraging students and scholars to carry the scientific researches and statistical graphic surveys which concentrate on the level of environmental awareness and consciousness.

+ Communicating local, state and administrative organizations and bodies; particularly the media in order to find the bases and principles of environmental awareness.

+ Educating about the protection of animal, plant and biological variation, the prevention of drastic hunting and grazing.

Conclusion

In a nutshell, findings of the study indicate that there is a good level of environmental awareness among college students. However, there is need for more action towards improvement of environment conditions rather than just awareness and implementation of strict environmental laws. Only necessary actions can reverse the damages we have caused to our environment and make it a better place for our future generation.

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Conceptual Article

Inclusive Education: Bridging Diversity and Learning

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Abstract

Inclusive education ensures all students regardless of physical, intellectual, emotional, or linguistic differences—can learn together in mainstream settings. It emphasizes equal access, tailored support, and participation for every child. While inclusive education promotes empathy, academic achievement, and dignity, it also faces challenges such as limited resources and the need for well-prepared teachers. This paper discusses current practices, policy contexts, teacher preparation, and strategies for creating supportive learning environments based on recent research and recommendations.

Keywords: Inclusive education, Equity, Diversity.

Introduction

Inclusive education has become a cornerstone of international educational policy, promoting diversity and equitable access to learning environments. It integrates children with disabilities and other marginalized groups into mainstream classrooms, supporting the comprehensive development of every learner. However, implementing inclusive practices presents unique challenges requiring systemic changes, professional development, and supportive classroom environments.

Defining Inclusive Education

Inclusive education refers to the process of educating students with special needs in regular classrooms alongside their peers, emphasizing participation, achievement, and social integration. The model requires schools to adapt curricula, teaching methods, and infrastructure to meet diverse learner needs.

Principles of Inclusion

- Equal access to learning resources for all students.

- Adaptation of teaching strategies for varied abilities.

- Emphasis on social participation and community values

Policy Frameworks and Global Perspectives

International conventions, such as the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, have shaped national policies toward inclusive education. Many countries have legislated mandatory inclusion and developed frameworks for its implementation, focusing on teacher training, resource allocation, and curriculum design.

National Policies

- India's Right to Education Act (RTE) mandates inclusive schooling.

- The UK and Australia have explicit requirements for inclusion in their educational systems.

- Policies often focus on removing physical, social, and instructional barriers.

Collaboration and Support Systems

Successful inclusive education depends on strong collaboration among teachers, special educators, administrators, families, and community resources. Ongoing communication and shared responsibility ensure each learner receives personalized support.

Effective Practices for Teacher Preparation

- Reflect on their own attitudes and embrace lifelong learning to foster inclusion. Professional Development: Teachers need ongoing training in inclusive strategies, classroom management, and assistive technology.

- Mentorship: Experienced educators can mentor peers, promoting a culture of empathy and inclusion.

- Reflective Practice: Teachers must

Advantages of Inclusive Education

1. Academic and Social Benefits

   o Promotes academic achievement for all students by fostering diverse perspectives in classrooms.

   o Enhances social skills, empathy, and acceptance among students.

   o Reduces stigma associated with disabilities and supports independent living.

2. Systemic Change

   o Inclusive education drives systemic change, improving accessibility and creating flexible learning environments.
   o Active involvement of families and communities strengthens school networks.

Challenges to Inclusive Practice

Teacher Preparation and Support

- Many teachers lack the knowledge, confidence, and resources to implement effective inclusion strategies.

- Inadequate training in instructional adaptations and classroom management for diverse needs.

Infrastructure and Resources

- Schools often require modifications in facilities, technology, and support staff to accommodate all students.

- Resource constraints and large class sizes can undermine implementation efforts.

Attitudinal Barriers

- Stereotypes and limited awareness contribute to exclusion, affecting both teachers and students.

- Building a culture of empathy and respect is essential for successful inclusion.

Strategies for Effective Implementation

1. Teacher Training

   o Regular professional development workshops focusing on inclusive practices, curriculum adaptation, and use of assistive technology.

   o Inclusion of sign language, Braille, and alternative teaching tools in teacher preparation programs.

2. Curriculum and Pedagogy

   o Adopting Universal Design for Learning (UDL) principles to ensure accessibility for all.

   o Incorporating multisensory instructional materials and differentiated instruction.

3. Collaborative Approaches

   o Encouraging partnerships among general and special education teachers.

   o Engaging parents, NGOs, and community organizations for holistic support

Future Directions in Inclusive Education

Research and practice must shift from a medical model of disability to a social model emphasizing participation and empowerment. Preparing future educators for inclusive classrooms involves embedding inclusive philosophies in teacher training curricula and developing advanced credentials for specialist roles.

Conclusion

Inclusive education is more than a set of policies—it is a profound commitment to humanity. It challenges communities to embrace diversity, transform attitudes, and provide equal opportunities for all learners. As educators, families, and policymakers work together, the heart of inclusive education beats in every moment of understanding, friendship, and shared achievement. True inclusion means seeing the whole child, celebrating differences, and believing in the limitless potential of every human being. By nurturing empathy, collaboration, and innovation, inclusive education lights the way to a more just and compassionate society.

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Conceptual Article

THE NEW NORMAL AND ITS EFFECTS ON THE TEACHING AND LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

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Abstract

The year 2025 has marked a significant shift in global weather patterns, introducing what is widely referred to as the "New Normal." This phenomenon, characterized by extreme and unpredictable climatic variations, has profoundly impacted multiple sectors, including education. Sudden temperature fluctuations, prolonged heatwaves, intense rainfalls, and recurring natural disasters, such as floods and storms, have disrupted the traditional teaching and learning environment. The present study explores how these weather-induced changes have redefined educational practices and institutional frameworks. The article highlights that frequent school closures due to hazardous weather have accelerated the adoption of remote and hybrid learning models, making technology integration a necessity rather than a choice. However, these solutions are not without challenges. Unequal access to digital resources, unstable internet connectivity during adverse weather, and inadequate teacher training have widened the learning gap, particularly in rural and marginalized communities. Moreover, erratic weather conditions have adversely affected student attendance, concentration, and overall mental well-being, creating a pressing need for adaptive strategies in pedagogy. Institutions have responded by implementing flexible academic calendars, establishing climate-resilient infrastructures, and incorporating disaster preparedness programs into curricula. Additionally, educators are employing innovative digital tools and asynchronous learning methods to ensure continuity during extreme weather events. Despite these efforts, the dependency on technology raises concerns about screen fatigue, reduced social interaction, and limited hands-on learning experiences. The article concludes that the New Normal in Weather Conditions demands a paradigm shift in educational policies and practices. Emphasis must be placed on sustainability, digital equity, and mental health support to build resilient teaching

and learning ecosystems. The findings underscore that addressing climate-induced disruptions is not merely an environmental concern but a fundamental educational imperative for the future.

Introduction

The year 2025 has ushered in a reality that educators and policymakers have come to refer to as the "New Normal." This term encapsulates a rapidly changing socio-environmental landscape where unprecedented weather patterns have become a defining feature of daily life. Unlike the pre-pandemic conceptualization of the New Normal, which primarily centred on digital transitions and health protocols, the current paradigm extends to encompass the unpredictable and often severe climatic shifts that directly influence societal functions, including education. Global warming, erratic monsoons, heatwaves, cyclones, and floods have intensified across regions, posing formidable challenges to the continuity and quality of teaching and learning processes. The classroom, once considered a stable space, now faces disruptions not only from technological transitions but also from environmental uncertainties.

The educational environment is inherently sensitive to external conditions, and weather anomalies significantly alter its dynamics. In 2025, several regions in India such as Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, and Maharashtra, have already witnessed extended school closures, reduced instructional hours and the relocation of physical classes due to extreme heat or flooding. In tropical countries, for instance, soaring temperatures have made conventional classroom settings uncomfortable, impairing both teaching effectiveness and student concentration. Similarly, rural schools in flood-prone areas have been converted into temporary shelters during emergencies, halting academic activities for weeks. These disruptions underscore a profound truth: the physical and psychological well-being of students and teachers is deeply intertwined with environmental stability. The recent wildfires in forests in countries such as California, Spain and Portugal have affected the livelihood of the people beyond measure. The unpredictable weather due to global warming has left the upper layer of the Earth crest vulnerable causing landslides in various parts of the country.

Understanding the impact of these changing weather patterns on education is not merely an academic exercise but a pressing necessity. Education is a fundamental human right and a cornerstone for sustainable development, yet it remains vulnerable to climatic volatility. As weather extremes become more frequent and severe, the risk of widening educational inequalities looms large. Students from marginalized backgrounds often face greater challenges in accessing remote learning technologies or relocating to safer learning environments during climate-induced school closures. This scenario raises critical questions about equity, resilience, and policy preparedness.

Furthermore, studying the intersection between weather conditions and education in 2025 is vital for informing adaptive strategies. Effective teaching and learning cannot occur in isolation from environmental realities; hence, educators, administrators, and policymakers must collaborate to design systems resilient to weather disruptions. This entails infrastructural adaptations such as climate-resilient school buildings, pedagogical flexibility through hybrid models, and policy frameworks that prioritize continuity of learning during emergencies. By examining current patterns and responses, scholars and practitioners can develop proactive measures to mitigate future challenges.

In essence, the "New Normal" in 2025 is characterized by a symbiotic relationship between climate and education a relationship that demands urgent attention. The impact of weather on the teaching-learning environment is no longer a distant concern but an immediate issue influencing educational access, quality, and equity. Therefore, exploring this nexus is indispensable for shaping a sustainable, inclusive, and adaptive educational future in the face of environmental uncertainty.

Understanding the New Normal

The year 2025 has witnessed unprecedented changes in weather patterns, shaping what is now termed the "New Normal." This concept reflects the altered climatic and environmental conditions that significantly influence social and economic structures, including education. The New Normal is characterized by frequent heatwaves, unpredictable rainfall, extended droughts, and intensified storms. These climatic disruptions affect the accessibility, safety, and continuity of education, making it imperative to examine their implications. Understanding this new

reality ensures preparedness for disruptions and helps educators, policymakers, and institutions develop adaptive strategies.

Definition and Characteristics of the New Weather Patterns

The new weather patterns refer to the altered climate conditions caused primarily by global warming, environmental degradation, and large-scale deforestation (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change [IPCC], 2023). Unlike previous decades, current climatic trends demonstrate increased variability, extreme temperature fluctuations, and a higher frequency of natural disasters. Globally, IPCC reports highlight that average surface temperatures have risen by approximately 1.1°C above pre-industrial levels, intensifying heatwaves and storms (IPCC, 2023).

For instance, regions that traditionally experienced moderate climates now encounter severe heat waves, while coastal areas face recurrent flooding and cyclonic activity (World Meteorological Organization [WMO], 2024). These shifts significantly affect education systems worldwide. In the United States, hurricanes and floods have forced repeated school closures, disrupting academic calendars (U.S. Department of Education, 2024). Similarly, in India, the Ministry of Education (2024) reported that unpredictable monsoon patterns and prolonged heatwaves have led to temporary shutdowns of schools in states like Rajasthan, Maharashtra and Kerala impacting instructional time and student attendance.

These characteristics create severe logistical challenges for educational institutions. Infrastructure damage due to flooding, transportation interruptions caused by storms, and heat-related illnesses among students and teachers are becoming more frequent (UNESCO, 2024). Furthermore, such weather extremes interfere with academic schedules, outdoor learning activities, and standardized examinations, often necessitating postponements or cancellations (UNICEF, 2024).

As a response, both national and international agencies are emphasizing the importance of building climate-resilient educational systems. UNESCO's *Education for Sustainable Development* framework advocates integrating climate adaptation strategies into school planning and curriculum development (UNESCO, 2024). In India, the National Education

Policy (NEP) 2020 underscores the need for digital and flexible learning options to ensure continuity during environmental disruptions (Government of India, 2020).

Global and Regional Trends in 2025

Globally, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) reports indicate that 2025 marks a critical point where climate instability directly influences human development sectors. Education is no exception. In tropical regions like South Asia and Africa, extended heatwaves and water shortages force frequent school closures, while northern regions experience disruptions due to sudden snowstorms and prolonged cold spells. Coastal nations such as Bangladesh and the Philippines face recurrent flooding, causing displacement of students and damage to educational facilities. In contrast, technologically advanced countries adapt through hybrid and online learning models, showcasing a widening digital divide between developed and developing nations.

Regionally, India and other South Asian countries encounter increased monsoon variability, resulting in delayed academic calendars and reduced instructional time. Meanwhile, developed nations in Europe and North America are integrating climate education into curricula, preparing students for sustainability challenges. These trends underscore the urgent need for context-specific strategies to maintain educational continuity.

The Impact of Weather Conditions on Teaching

Weather conditions significantly influence the teaching and learning environment in educational institutions. In recent years, unpredictable climatic patterns such as extreme heatwaves, floods, heavy rainfall, and cyclones have created disruptions in academic activities across the globe. Understanding the impact of these weather-related challenges is essential for planning effective teaching strategies and maintaining educational continuity.

Classroom Infrastructure Challenges

Severe weather conditions often expose the vulnerabilities of school and college infrastructure. For example, prolonged heatwaves can make poorly ventilated classrooms uncomfortable, reducing student concentration and teacher efficiency. Similarly, heavy rains may cause water seepage, leakage of roofs, and flooding of school grounds, which

compromises the safety of students. For instance, during the summer of 2024, several states in India experienced record-breaking temperatures above 45°C. Many government schools lacking proper fans or air conditioning had to shorten school hours to prevent heat-related illnesses among students. Similarly, in Florida, USA, hurricanes often damage classroom buildings, forcing schools to remain closed for weeks. Such infrastructural challenges not only affect the physical environment but also strain financial resources, as schools need to invest in weather-proofing classrooms, installing air coolers, or shifting to temporary learning spaces.

Teacher Preparedness and Adaptation Strategies

Teachers play a crucial role in mitigating the adverse effects of weather conditions on education. Preparedness involves planning alternative methods of instruction and ensuring the safety and well-being of students during extreme weather events. Adaptation strategies include flexible lesson planning, incorporating technology, and leveraging blended learning models. For instance, when Chennai faced severe floods in 2023, many teachers adapted by using WhatsApp groups and Google Classroom to continue lessons remotely. Teachers who had prior digital training could seamlessly shift to virtual platforms, whereas those lacking such skills faced delays in resuming classes. Effective adaptation strategies may include: developing emergency lesson plans, training in the use of online teaching tools, scheduling classes during cooler hours in extreme heat conditions and organizing mock drills for natural disasters like earthquakes and cyclones. Weather conditions can disrupt traditional face-to-face instruction, making alternative teaching models essential. Heavy rainfall or snowstorms can prevent students and teachers from reaching schools, while prolonged heat or floods may force institutions to close temporarily. In such scenarios, hybrid and online modes of instruction ensure academic continuity.

Face-to-Face Challenges

During heat waves, students in non-air-conditioned classrooms often face dehydration, fatigue, and reduced learning efficiency. Teachers also struggle to maintain engagement under such conditions. Hence, hybrid and online classes can help when schools cannot operate at full capacity due to infrastructure damage. Online learning platforms like Zoom, Microsoft Teams, and Google Meet enable teachers to conduct classes remotely during floods, cyclones, or extreme temperatures. For instance, in Japan, during typhoon season, schools often switch to

online learning to prevent travel-related risks. Similarly, in the U.S., "snow days" have been replaced by virtual classes to ensure that the students do not miss curriculum deadlines.

Student Attendance and Engagement

Climate changes in 2025 have introduced severe challenges to educational systems, significantly affecting student attendance and engagement. Extreme weather events such as heatwaves, floods, and cyclones disrupt the regular functioning of schools and colleges, forcing unplanned closures. In many regions, transportation networks collapse due to heavy rains or storms, making it difficult for students to reach schools. Even when institutions remain open, attendance rates decline because families prioritize safety or relocate temporarily. Engagement in learning also suffers under these conditions. Frequent interruptions break the continuity of teaching and learning processes, resulting in learning gaps. Students attending online or hybrid classes due to weather constraints often face distractions and lack the structured environment of physical classrooms. Consequently, maintaining motivation and participation becomes a significant challenge for educators, especially for younger learners who thrive in interactive and social settings.

Physical and Psychological Effects on Learners

The physical and psychological well-being of students is directly impacted by changing climate conditions. Prolonged heat waves increase the risk of dehydration, fatigue, and heat-related illnesses, making it hard for learners to concentrate during lessons. Similarly, poor air quality during wildfire seasons or dust storms leads to respiratory issues, forcing students to miss classes frequently. Beyond physical health, psychological effects are profound. Anxiety about natural disasters, displacement, or uncertainty about academic continuity creates stress among learners. Those who have experienced disasters firsthand may exhibit symptoms of trauma, including withdrawal, fear, and reduced cognitive performance. The constant adaptation to shifting modes of instruction—moving between in-person, hybrid, and online formats—adds another layer of psychological strain, diminishing the overall quality of the learning experience.

Access to Resources and Equity Issues

Climate-induced disruptions intensify existing inequities in education. Students from marginalized communities are disproportionately affected, as they lack access to the technological resources needed for remote learning. When schools close due to adverse weather, learners without internet connectivity or digital devices fall behind their peers, widening the achievement gap. Additionally, power outages during storms or floods further restrict access to online platforms, limiting learning opportunities for those who depend on virtual classes. For rural and economically disadvantaged students, even basic educational materials like textbooks and stationery become difficult to procure during prolonged weather emergencies.

Equity issues also extend to physical infrastructure. Wealthier institutions often have climate-resilient buildings with cooling systems, while public schools in vulnerable regions operate in unsafe structures prone to flooding or roof damage. These disparities lead to unequal learning environments, where some students continue their education uninterrupted. Addressing these challenges requires urgent policy interventions focusing on climate-resilient educational infrastructure, equitable digital access, and psychosocial support systems for students. Without such measures, the learning environment in 2025 risks becoming increasingly fragmented and unequal, undermining the goals of inclusive and sustainable education for all.

Conclusion

The "New Normal" in education, driven by unprecedented weather variability and global climate disruptions, demands adaptive strategies that prioritize resilience in both teaching and learning environments. Institutions must integrate flexible instructional models, such as hybrid and online modalities, to ensure continuity despite infrastructural or logistical challenges. Teachers need to adopt technology-driven approaches and incorporate climate-conscious planning to safeguard learning equity and engagement. Emphasis on digital readiness, psychological well-being, and resource accessibility is critical to address disparities and maintain academic integrity during climate-induced disruptions. Ultimately, fostering resilience requires collaborative efforts between policymakers, educators, and communities to

create adaptive frameworks that support sustainable and inclusive education in an evolving environmental context.

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