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The National Life Skills, Values Education & School Wellness Program

Healthy Schools Healthy India

Education is not preparation for life...
Education is life itself

- John Dewey

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- All submissions should follow the APA 7th Edition style
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Message from the Patrons

It is a matter of great happiness to note that the latest issue of the Indian Journal of School Health & Wellbeing, published by Expressions India, is being released. It is well known that Research publications, and in particular journals, are the most authentic sources of verified knowledge and experience. The sharing of such knowledge and experiences not only among the Researchers, Scientists, Policy Planners and Implementers, but also among the Activists working in the concerned area and persons with a special interest in it, benefits all. It is our privilege to reiterate that Expressions India has been doing pioneering work for a long time in the field of Health Education through its “Holistic Health and School Wellness Programme” to enable holistic school education and facilitate teachers in realising the goal of Health Education in Schools. The present publication is a momentous indicator of this initiative.

The major bottleneck in achieving the objective of Health Education has been the particularistic conceptualisation of its transaction process. The goal of developing holistic health and well-being in young learners cannot be achieved by having them gather certain information and rote-learn it. It can be attained only through a transactional process focused on experiential co-scholastic methodology that ensures active participation by learners and substantially contributes to the development of life skills, enabling young children to manage their lives more competently and grow as truly empowered human resources for the nation and human society at large. To facilitate this process, it is critical to encourage and empower teachers to act as facilitators and mentors.

The formal school education system needs to look towards interacting and taking the support from the initiatives like the one taken by Expressions India under its National Life Skills Education & School Wellness Programme aimed at realising the Goal of “HEALTHY SCHOOL.....HEALTHY INDIA”. It is pertinent to state that the Schools and other educational institutions that have been associated with such endeavours have strongly felt the need for such programs to be adopted by all schools, including the Higher Education System.

It is in this context that the Journal of School Health has the potential to reinforce the process of realising the vision of Health Promoting Schools getting integrated into the education system in India. We are more than confident that the present issue of the Journal will strengthen this grand endeavour and empower all who are creatively engaged in promoting Health Education in Schools. With immense pleasure, we would like to express our gratitude to the Advisory group, Editorial Board, and Members of the Executive Editorial Committee for their valuable contributions, ungrudging cooperation, and keen interest, and for making the benefits of their rich experience and knowledge available.

“If there is will, there is a way, and if the will is reinforced by enlightened path-breakers, the way will lead to the destination at the earliest “.

**Dr. Jitendra Nagpal, M.D.,
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Adolescent Life Skills Development and Future Readiness: A Qualitative Analysis and Systematic Literature Review

Navnoor Kaur¹

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Abstract

In today's dynamic world, adolescent life skills development plays a crucial role in ensuring future readiness, youth employability, and overall, well-being. Essential 21-century skills such as critical thinking, problem solving, emotional intelligence, communication and adaptability help adolescent navigate academic, professional, and personal challenges. This study employs a qualitative approach, integrating a descriptive survey questionnaire of 20 adolescents along with systematic literature review of 35 studies to explore how school-based life skills education contributes to career readiness in youth. Additionally, it highlights life skills activities and strategies adopted by schools in Delhi to enhance student preparedness. The primary data is collected through an open-ended questionnaire to understand students' opinions on key life skills, challenges in skill development. The systematic literature review identifies trends in emotional intelligence in adolescents, school-based interventions, and challenges such as curriculum limitations, socio-economic barriers and lack of experiential training. Findings indicate that while students recognize the importance of life skills, practical applications within the education system remains limited. By analysing real-world school interventions of some schools in Delhi, the study provides insights into successful strategies such as interactive learning modules, mentorship programs, self-awareness boosting workshops and policy-driven life skills integration. The research emphasizes the significance of holistic education policies to equip adolescents with resilience,

decision taking abilities and adaptability for an evolving workforce. Findings contribute to the discourse on life skills education, advocating for an inclusive, experiential, and future-oriented approach to adolescent development.

Keywords: Adolescent Life Skills; Future Readiness; Youth Employability; 21stCentury Skills; Career Readiness in Youth

1. Introduction

Life skills are essential abilities, attitudes and socio-emotional competencies that help individuals learn, make informed decisions, and lead productive lives. They enhance mental well-being, support foundational skills like literacy and digital proficiency, and apply to areas such as gender equality, environmental education, and health promotion. Life skills empower young people to engage in communities, pursue lifelong learning, and build positive relationships. Various organisations define life skills based on their programmatic focus. The World Health Organisation (WHO) views them as abilities that foster adaptive and positive behaviours to handle daily challenges, particularly in health. The World Bank takes a broader approach, defining life skills as social and behavioural competencies, often called soft or noncognitive skills, essential for navigating everyday life. UNICEF's MENA framework sees life skills development as a holistic process across four dimensions-cognitive, individual, social and instrumental- integral to quality education. Overall, life skills are universally relevant yet adaptable to different contexts. Integrating life skills into school curricula enhances the wellbeing of children and adolescents. The World Health Organisation (WHO) highlights essential skills such as decision making for informed choices, creative and critical thinking for problem solving and communication for effective expression. Self-awareness, empathy and interpersonal skills strengthen social interactions, while coping with emotions and stress fosters resilience. Together, these skills empower individuals to navigate challenges, promoting personal growth and overall well-being.

Adolescence is a dynamic and transformative phase, marking the transition from childhood to adulthood. According to American Psychological Association (APA), it begins with puberty (around 10-12 years old) and continues until physiological maturity (about 19 years), though the exact timeline varies for each individual. This period is filled with growth, exploration and self-discovery, but it also comes with its fair share of challenges-emotional ups and downs peer pressure, and the struggle to find one's place in the world. With increasing independence, adolescents make crucial decisions about their identity, relationships and future. Developing essential life skills during this time helps them manage emotions, build healthy relationships, and make informed choices. By fostering self-awareness, communication and resilience, life skill education empowers young people to navigate challenges with confidence, preparing them for adulthood and a successful future.

CBSE mandates Life Skills Education for classes VI–X to foster self-confidence, eco-sensitivity, and a positive outlook. While schools have made progress, stronger curriculum integration and stakeholders capacity building are needed. To support this, an Advocacy Programme empowers school leaders to champion students' socio-emotional well-being. Aligned with NEP 2020, which emphasizes critical thinking, creativity, and adaptability, integrating life skills enhances problem-solving, communication and collaboration skills. It builds character, responsibility and ethical decision-making, preparing students for both academic success and real-world challenges. By fostering resilience, adaptability, and independent thinking, Life Skills Education equips adolescents with the competencies needed for future careers, responsible citizenship, and lifelong learning. These skills, including teamwork, leadership, decision - making and emotional intelligence, are highly valued in the workplace, enhancing employability and preparing students for dynamic and evolving job market.

1.1 Objectives

1. To explore the role of life skills education in enhancing adolescent future readiness and employability.
2. To identify key challenges students, face in acquiring and applying life skills in daily life.
3. To analyse strategies used by schools in Delhi to foster life skills and career preparedness.
4. To recommend improvements in school curricula for better integration of life skill education

2. Literature Review

A literature review was conducted in which 35 research papers and journal articles were reviewed:

Life skill development among adolescents: Singla et al. (2019) reviewed 50 RCTs on adolescent life skills programs in LMICs, showing improvements in mental health (PTSD, depression, anxiety, anger) and life skills. Success factors include stress management, interpersonal skills, and parent-child interactions, but biases and missing data were noted. Danish et al. (2002) discuss a sports-based intervention for life skills development, introducing the Sports United program with guidelines for implementation. Vranda & Chandrasekhar-Rao (2007) highlight adolescence as a critical phase with stress and risky behaviors. WHO (1993) defines ten core life skills for well-being. Bharath et al. (2002, 2003, 2005) developed India's Cascade Model for schools, while Vranda (2009) created the Life Skills Scale (LSS). Programs like AEP and NIMHANS train youth in psychosocial skills. Young et al. (2006) found a life skills-based PE program for ninth-grade girls increased class activity ($P < .001$), reduced TV time ($P = .03$), and improved fitness ($P < .001$) but did not impact overall energy use. Jafarigiv & Peyman (2019) found life skills training with health literacy improved self-esteem and self-efficacy ($p < .001$). Yankey & Biswas (2012) showed LST reduces stress among Tibetan refugee adolescents.

Anand et al. (2013) found life skills training increased adolescent physical activity in Delhi. Roy et al. (2016) showed a seven-session LST reduced stress among 42 adolescent boys. Kaur (2011) found a three-month life skills program improved emotional intelligence, self-efficacy, and self-esteem in college students. Kaur & Kaur (2022) found a 40-session LST improved 9th graders' psychological well-being. Ayub et al. (2015) evaluated the Plan-It Girls program, finding early exposure enhances self-esteem, self-efficacy, gender attitudes, and employability. Raj & Sathiyam (2025) explored an AI-driven recommendation system for life skills and wellbeing. Srinivasan et al. (2025) found Nae Disha 3 moderately improved resilience but had no major impact on mental health or gender attitudes. Nag et al. (2025) reviewed five school-based interventions in India promoting gender equality, all showing positive outcomes. Rajamanickam et al. (2025) found emotional learning improves well-being through self-regulation, relationships, and prosocial behaviour but does not boost academic performance. Kumar & Kant (2025) showed Culturally Responsive Instruction enhances social, emotional, and collaborative skills among Bihar middle schoolers. Podiya et al. (2025) reviewed 11 studies (2000–2023) on school climate, linking positive factors to lower stress, higher self-esteem, and academic success. Pradeep et al. (2019) evaluated Karnataka's YLSECS program, finding improved awareness and confidence but a need for post-training support.

Future Readiness among Adolescents: Gee et al. (2020) highlight the need for innovative strategies to enhance college and career readiness for underserved youth, emphasizing evidence-based factors and stakeholder perspectives. Bansal & Kapur (2024) examine life skills' impact on job readiness and career success, proposing a student-industry alignment framework. Burrus et al. (2018) reviewed 36 studies on adolescent transition interventions, finding 75% had positive outcomes but called for more rigorous, theory-driven approaches. Marciniak et al. (2022) identified fragmented career preparedness concepts, proposing a framework of attitudes, knowledge, competencies, and behaviours. Nelson & Condrin (2008) developed the VRIL program for psychiatrically impaired adolescents, integrating structured learning with daily living skills. Knox (2023) found behaviour, peer relationships, and family/community support enhance college and career readiness among 8,541 rural adolescents. Santha et al. (2019) analysed 100 livelihood

programs, noting innovation but frequent failure due to funding gaps, advocating multi-stakeholder partnerships. Ibarraran et al. (2014) evaluated the Dominican Republic's Juventud y Empleo program, finding increased job formality for men, earnings growth, and reduced teenage pregnancy but no overall employment impact. Lifshitz (2017) assessed an Israeli employability program for at-risk youth, highlighting improved job skills and the need for culturally tailored approaches. Jackson & Lambert (2023) found many parents lack awareness of job trends, underscoring the need for better parental career guidance. Leventhal et al. (2021) found Bihar's Youth First program improved problem-solving and future planning, enhancing youth resilience. Ningthoujam et al. (2022) explored career aspirations among Manipur youth, noting high ambition but barriers like limited opportunities and socioeconomic constraints, with family support being crucial. Kumar et al. (2021) found Plan-It Girls improved self-esteem, self-efficacy, gender attitudes, and employability, with early exposure most effective. Kounkroo (2025) developed the SBULCK Model in Thailand, significantly enhancing 21st-century skills like emotional management, flexibility, and leadership. Osiesi & Blignaut (2025) found the TEC at Nelson Mandela University fosters 21st-century skills but faces workload and digital literacy challenges. Chasokela (2025) examined technology integration in STEM education in Zimbabwe, identifying faculty training and resource gaps as key challenges, recommending better collaboration and support.

The present study focuses on the role of school-based programs and parental involvement in fostering life skills among adolescent. It examines challenges in acquiring skills like problem solving, emotional intelligence, and adaptability while assessing the strategies used by schools in Delhi to enhance career preparedness. As traditional education often overlooks practical skills, this study aims to provide insights and recommendations to improve life skills education for better future readiness.

3. Materials and Methods

3.1. Research Design

This study adopts a Qualitative approach, combining a descriptive survey questionnaire administered to 20 adolescents with a systematic literature review of 35 studies. Primary data is gathered through an open-ended questionnaire designed to capture students' perspectives on the role of school, teachers and parents on instilling life skill development in adolescents. Thematic analysis was employed to explore the sub-themes identified in the study. The systematic literature review highlights the important of life skill education in students' life and making them equip to handle the future challenges effectively.

3.2. Participants and Setting

The study employed using purposive sampling, a non-probability sampling technique. The sample of the study consisted of 20 participants between the age group of 16-18 years. The students studying in Delhi private school were chosen for the study. An exploratory research approach was used to gather the data, making it especially useful for understanding and gaining insights on the topics which are not fully understood.

Inclusion Criteria:

1. Participants aged 16-18 years.
2. Participants studying in a private school in Delhi.
3. The focused literature studies were conducted between 2005-2025.

Exclusion Criteria:

1. Participants from Government School.

2. Participants who are below 16 or above 18 years of age.

4. Results

Tabular Representation of Theme-Based Analysis of Life skill Education

S.NO	Themes	Description	Evidence
1. Confidence in Applying Life skills			
	Confidence in Applying Life skills	The transition from learning life skills to applying them in real world scenarios.	Many students feel somewhat confidence but acknowledge the gap between theory and practice. Practical exposure strengthens understanding.
	Importance of practice and adaptability.	Life Skill requires continuous learning and real-world application to develop confidence.	Some respondents expressed confidence in problem solving and decision making while others highlighted struggles with applying skills consistently.
	Situational Confidence and Skill refinement	Confidence fluctuates depending on experience, context and personal growth.	While some feel prepared for real world challenges, other noted that unexpected situations test their adaptability.
2. Role of Teachers, Parents and mentors			
	Guidance and Support	Teacher, parents, and mentors shape the learning process through structured guidance.	Teachers provide learning opportunities; parents reinforce emotional intelligence and financial literacy; mentor offer career insights.
	Teaching Problem Solving and communication	Critical thinking, group discussions and role-playing are key tools in life skills education.	Respondents mentioned group activities, discussions and real-life storytelling as effective ways to develop skills.

Experiential Learning and Mentorship	Real-world exposure through mentorship, internship and shadowing professionals.	Mentors help in career planning, leadership training, and real-world decision making by sharing their personal experiences.
3. Challenges in Applying Life skills		
Unpredictability of real-world scenarios	Real-life situations often do not have predefined solutions, making adaptability crucial.	Many respondents noted that while they have learned problem techniques, applying them in high pressure situations remains difficult.
Emotional Intelligence and Stress management	The ability to manage stress, emotions and interpersonal relationships effectively.	Some individuals feel confident in handling conflict resolution, while others struggle with maintaining composure under pressure.
Confidence fluctuations	Varying levels of confidence due to external challenges and self-doubt	Several responses mentioned moments of high confidence followed by self-doubt in complex situations.
4. Enhancing life skill education		
Real world applications and practical training	Moving beyond textbooks to experiential learning such as internships and simulations	Schools should incorporate hands on training, mentorship programs, role playing and interactive workshops to bridge the gap between knowledge and application.
Financial Literacy and Career Readiness	Equipping students with knowledge about financial management, budgeting and entrepreneurship.	Respondents emphasized the need for financial literacy training, career exploration and exposure to professional environments.
Emotional Intelligence and Mental Health	Teaching students how to manage emotions, deal with stress and build resilience.	Schools should integrate mental health awareness, stress management techniques and peer support programs.
Communication and Interpersonal Skills	Developing the ability to express thoughts effectively and build relationships.	Respondents stressed the significance of interactive discussions, public speaking and real-life conversation practice.

5. Effective Teaching strategies for life skills		
Interactive and experiential learning	Engaging students through hands on activities, role playing and simulations.	The most effective methods include group discussions, real world case studies, and problem-solving exercises.
Mentorship and career exposure	Pairing students with mentors for practical learning and career guidance.	Guest lectures, career fairs and industry collaborations can enhance life skill education.
Integration of technology and future skills	Preparing students for technological advancements and digital literacy.	School should introduce coding, AI awareness and digital communication to align with modern job markets.

5. Discussion

The aim of this study is to explore the role of teachers, parents and mentors in life skills education and to identify useful strategies for improving life skills training in school and preparing adolescents for their future life. Through the qualitative thematic analysis and an in- depth review of 35 scholarly articles, this study provides a comprehensive examination of key themes, offering a deeper understanding of life skills education and its practical implications. The primary data was collected from 20 adolescents falling in the age group 16-18 years. The data was thematically analysed and the findings highlight the crucial role of life skills in education in framing an individual's ability to navigate personal and professional challenges. The responses emphasize the significance of practical application, mentorship, emotional intelligence and real-world exposure in increasing life skills development. Many participants acknowledge that while they have some level of confidence in their ability to apply life skills, there remains a significant gap between theoretical knowledge and real works execution. This gap underscores the need for situational adaptability and continuous practice. These results align with previous research suggesting that experiential learning methods, such as problem- solving activities and interactive discussions are key to bridging the gap between knowledge and application (kolb,1984). Similarly, Singla et al. (2019) reviewed 50 randomized controlled RCTs on adolescent life skills program in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs), highlighting that stress management, interpersonal skills and parent child interactions play a crucial; role in the success of such programs.

Teachers, parents and mentors play a significant role in life skills education by providing guidance, support and real- life examples. Teachers introduce problem solving, communication and critical thinking through structured lesson and activities while parents instil emotional intelligence and financial literacy through everyday interactions. Mentors offer career guidance leadership training and insights from personal experiences, contributing to a well-rounded skill set. The presence of supportive figures helps individuals develop resilience and confidence in applying life skills in real world situations. This is supported by a research study done by Kaur & Kaur (2022), who found that a 40-session life skill training (LST) program significantly improved psychological well-being among ninth graders. Similarly, Rajamanickam et al. (2025) found that emotional learning enhances well-being by fostering self-regulations, interpersonal relationships and prosocial behaviour. Jackson and Lambert (2023) also emphasized the need for parental involvement, showing that many parents lack awareness of evolving job trends, which impacts students' career readiness. These findings reinforce the importance of integrating parents and mentors into school-based life skill education.

Top schools in Delhi have integrated innovative life skills programs to enhance student

preparedness. The Shri Ram school emphasizes mindfulness and emotional intelligence, while The Heritage School focuses on experiential learning and decision making. Vasant Valley school runs mentorship and career-oriented workshops and Amity International school fosters leadership through extracurriculars. DPS RK Puram integrates career readiness and vocational training, while The British school promotes digital literacy in AI, coding and cyber safety. Schools such as Venkateshwar, GD Goenka, Sanskriti, Bal Bharti, and Maxfort Rohini are developing well-rounded pupils by incorporating STEAM-based learning via Atal Tinkering Labs, financial literacy programs, and practical training. These efforts promote critical thinking, adaptability, and problem solving, in line with UNESCO (2016), which highlights the long-term benefits of life skills education. Despite getting life skills instruction, many students struggle to handle stress, negotiate emotions, and make decisions under pressure owing to a lack of real-world experience. Roy et al. (2016), Yankey & Biswas (2012), and Kaur (2011) found that organized training greatly improved emotional intelligence and resilience. This emphasizes the value of hands-on learning techniques such as mentorship and real-world simulations (Goleman, 1995).

To bridge this gap, experts recommend moving away from traditional lecture-based teaching toward more interactive approaches such as internships, mentorship, and role-playing exercises. Digital literacy, financial education, and career readiness are also crucial for preparing students for the evolving job market. Research by Kounkroo (2025) in Thailand and Osiesi & Blignaut (2025) at Nelson Mandela University signifies the need to integrate technology in education while addressing digital literacy gaps (World Economic Forum, 2020).

5.1. Suggestions and Recommendations

Future studies should include schools from different regions to improve generalizability. Using a mixed-method approach, combining quantitative surveys with qualitative analysis, can provide deeper insights. Additionally, longitudinal research can help assess the long-term impact of life skills educations on career readiness and emotional well-being.

Schools should integrate life skills education through practical activities, workshops and real-world applications to enhance student learning. Teacher training programs must equip educators with effective strategies for developing life skills in adolescents. Strengthening school-parent collaboration through interactive sessions can support students 'skill building' and can give them broader perspective towards life. Finally, implementing hands-on and experiential learning methods, such as peer mentoring, role playing and real-life stimulations can make life skill education more engaging and impactful.

6. Conclusions

To make life skills education truly effective, schools must move beyond theory and focus on real world applications. A blend of experiential learning, mentorship and mental health awareness and technological adaptability will better equip students for future challenges. This study provides insights for educators, policymakers and parents on the role of schools and families in fostering life skills among adolescents. Understanding school-based programs can help refine teaching approaches to enhance problem-solving, emotional intelligence and adaptability. It also emphasizes parental involvement and foster policy recommendations for integrating life skill education into curricula, improving career readiness and emotional- wellbeing.

The study focuses only on schools in Delhi, limiting its generalizability to other regions. Self-reported data may introduce bias, as responses could be influenced by personal perceptions. Additionally, the qualitative approach lacks quantitative comparisons, restricting statistical analysis of life skills programs effectiveness.

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A Pilot Study to Understand the Emerging Perspective of Inclusive School and Mental Health Paradigms

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Abstract

Inclusive schools are schools where all students get equal opportunities to learn and receive equal treatment. Inclusive schools promote diversity by providing a healthy environment that accommodates students with disabilities, socioeconomic disadvantages, and differential learning ability. Mental health is an integral aspect of students, teachers and parents for inclusivity in school. The evolving digital sphere is creating the digital divide through social media and online learning platforms among students, teachers and parents, which may lead to mental health issues and inequality among stakeholders, which may affect the ability to learn of students. The inclusive school concept has been rapidly evolving, so there is a need to understand the association between mental health and school inclusion. A pilot study has been designed based on a meta-analysis approach of relevant published research literature. This study addresses the question about how inclusive school resolves mental health challenges, implements relevant policies and merges the socio-emotional framework. This study's results indicate there is a paradigm shift towards trauma-informed education, strategies for holistic well-being and the significant role of teachers in the mentally healthy learning sphere. The

study also suggested effective recommendations for upcoming research and policies to promote inclusive school practices that consider mental health as an integral part.

Keywords: Inclusive school, Mental health, Digital divide, Socio-emotional framework

1. Introduction

The concept of inclusive education is evolving, as earlier it was inclusive of students with learning disabilities, but now it has expanded its horizon to include those who are neurodivergent, disfranchised, and psychologically challenged (Ainscow, 2020). Presently, the mental health of students is considered an integral part of education policy and practices (Slee, 2018). According to the World Health Organization, there is a need to study the association between inclusive school and mental health because of the increasing prevalence of anxiety, depression and learning disability among students (WHO, 2022). A pilot study designed was and conducted based on meta-analysis to investigate how inclusive schools merged mental health in their pedagogy. Content analysis was applied to explore the trends in inclusive school and mental health.

1.1. Objectives and Research Questions

The research aims to explore the relationship between inclusive schools and student mental health, analyse emerging frameworks such as trauma-informed pedagogy and social-emotional learning (SEL), and assess the role of teachers and school policies in fostering mental well-being in inclusive settings.

1. How do inclusive schools integrate mental health in their teaching methods?
2. What are the upcoming strategies used in inclusive schools?
3. How do the school policies and teacher training impact mental health outcomes in inclusive environments?

2. Literature Review

Initially, the goal of inclusive education was to integrate students with disabilities into regular classrooms (Ainscow, 2002). Researchers now focus on equity-driven education, taking behavioural, cognitive, and socioemotional factors into account (Florian, 2014). According to WHO (2022), mental health interventions in schools are essential. It has been studied (Reinke et al., 2011) that these learning disability, peer pressure, and academic stress lead to mental health issues in school students. A study conducted by Rajendran P et al. establishes that the inclusion of ICT in the curriculum of special educational need students is mandatory to eliminate the barriers of inclusive classrooms (Rajendran P et al. 2023). According to Brunzell et al., schools are considering models that give importance to student trauma and give a supportive learning sphere (Brunzell et al., 2019). Durlak et al. determined that social-emotional learning programs enhance the level of resilience, emotional remodelling and academic excellence (Durlak et al., 2011). In the study of Meyers, it was acknowledged that universal design for learning (UDL) offered modulable learning strategies to adapt to cognitive diversities and emotional factors (Gorden D et al. 2016). Johansson et al, observed in their study that people with disabilities related to language and understanding have reported more difficulties in using the internet in comparison to other disability groups, and also, they noticed

that a larger proportion of participants than the general Swedish population did not feel digitally included (Johansson, S., et al. 2021).

3. Method

This study uses the Meta-analysis approach and content analysis. Meta-analysis was done using comprehensive Meta-Analysis (CMA) software. We used qualitative content analysis to explore trends, themes, and patterns in peer-reviewed research articles regarding inclusive schools and mental health. In our study, the source of data was published peer-reviewed journal articles, empirical study and policy reports published during years 2000 to 2025. Most relevant research articles (n=25) were screened and downloaded from jSTORE, WHO, Google Scholar, PubMed, and Scopus databases. We used inclusion criteria about selecting studies that focused on mental health and inclusive schools, and further, we have excluded the studies that do not impact the school teaching method and school policies. For data analysis, we used thematic coding. Data was coded in social-emotional learning, trauma-informed education and teacher training. Frequency analysis was done to identify trends in prevalence of certain education strategies. Further comparative analysis was done to evaluate the effectiveness of different approaches (social-emotional learning, trauma-informed education and teacher training) in inclusive schools.

3.1. Data Analysis

3.1.1 Thematic Analysis

On thematic analysis of screened research studies, we have identified three segments which played a vital role in the association of mental health of students and inclusive school. The core identified segments are social-emotional learning, trauma-informed approaches and teacher training. These approaches are signs that inclusive education should expand their horizon beyond physical accessibility and consider the inclusion of mental health and well-being of students.

In our result, it was found that 65% of studies were conducted to investigate the role of trauma-informed education in inclusive school environments. In the study of Brunzell et al., Perry and Denial inference that adverse childhood experiences, which may include domestic violence, neglect, poverty and displacement, could influence emotional regulation, behavioural issues and lower grades in academic learning environment (Perry and Daniels, 2016; Brunzell et al., 2019). Inclusive schools follow a trauma-informed approach. As per the study of Cole et al., trauma-sensitive schools use structured routines that provide a protective environment to students for their development (Cole et al., 2013). Protective environments such as safe spaces and calming areas within school premises play a vital role in the self-regulation of emotions of students. Another important finding is that trauma-sensitive schools follow restorative discipline in place of punitive measure. In the study of Gregory et al., it was observed that punitive measures such as suspension cause emotional distress in students. Restorative practices focus on conflict resolution, empathy, and relationship building that may lead to reduction in abnormal behaviour and school dropouts (Gregory et al., 2018). Trauma-sensitive schools provide mental health intervention; As per the study of Chafoules et al., these schools have onsite counselors and mental health professionals, which played an important role in the reduction of behavioural issues and enhanced school attendance (Chafoules et al., 2016). In the Stein B D et al. study, it was observed that cognitive behavioural therapy-based school programs enhance emotional resilience among traumatised students (Stein, B. D. et al., 2002). Further results of our study found that 26% of studies explored the social-emotional learning approach as an integral part of school curriculum that indicate role of SEL in construction of

students emotional intelligence, interpersonal skill and self regulation of emotion. According to Durlak et al. 's collaborative for academic, social and emotional learning (CASEL) framework, five core SEL competencies are recognised: self-awareness that indicates emotions, thoughts and value; management that indicates regulation emotions, stress and impulses; social awareness that indicates inculcating empathy and respect for others, Relationship skill that indicate about effective communication, conflict resolution, Responsible decision making that indicate about ethical, constructive behaviour and social interaction. Further, we analysed the impact of SEL on inclusive education. In the study of Mahoney et al., it was found that schools that follow the SEL approach observed lower dropout rates, enhanced student engagement and improved mental health (Mahoney et al., 2018). In the study by Elias and Haynes, it has been observed that the SEL program in inclusive schools enhanced social skills and reduced social exclusion for neurodiverse students (Elias and Haynes, 2008). Taylor et al. showed in their study an 11% enhancement in academic performance and also showed greater level emotional resilience in students of inclusive schools who follow the SEL framework (Taylor et al., 2017). In the study of Jagers et al., it was found that it is challenging to implement the SEL framework in inclusive schools because of the diversity of student cultural background, so there is a need for a culturally responsive SEL framework, and another challenge is inconsistent SEL training for educators (Jagers et al., 2019). Further results of our study indicated that 9% of studies explored the role of teacher training on student mental health. In the study of Rothi et al., it was concluded that teacher has frontline role in diagnosis early symptoms of depression, anxiety and behavioural disorder and it observed that many teachers not have skill to understand student mental health and to provide adequate support to students (Reinke et al 2011; Rothi et al., 2008). In the study of Mazzer and Rick Wood, it was found that most teacher education programs lack mandatory mental health training, and that leads the teacher to be underprepared to handle mental health issues(Mazzer and Rickwood, 2015). Whitley et al. reported in their study that when teachers received training, it enhanced the teachers' confidence and equipped them to address student well-being (Whitley et al., 2013). Teacher training in mental health enhances professionalism among teachers. In the study of Jennings and Greenberg, it was reported that schools that provide mental health workshops regularly equipped teachers to notice early symptoms of emotional distress among students (Jennings and Greenberg, 2009). Jorms and Kitcheners showed in their study that schools that implement mental health first aid (MHFA) training observed a high level of teacher effectiveness in supporting students with depression and anxiety (Jorms and Kitchner, 2010). Further, we investigated the barrier in effective teacher training. In a study by Graham et al., it was noticed that teachers mostly lack time to engage in additional mental health training; therefore, time constraint is the most important barrier (Graham et al., 2011). Another barrier is the lack of institutional support to teacher training in mental health. In the study of Schonert-Reichl, it was noticed that without adequate mental health support, teachers themselves experience burnout and secondary trauma when they work with at-risk students (Schonert-Reichl, 2017).

3.1.2 Holistic Model Analysis:

To understand the impact of the holistic Model in research studies the interaction of the Trauma-informed approach, SEL and teacher training framework was investigated and it was found that these segments are interconnected and display abilities to contribute to mentally healthy and inclusive school environments and helped in the development of a holistic approach to inclusion and mental health. In the study of Osher et al. (2021), it was observed that trauma-sensitive schools benefited from SEL programs as both emphasised on emotional regulation, conflict resolution and relationship building (Osher et al., 2018). In a study by Darling-Hammond, it was observed that teacher training in mental health equipped teachers to implement both SEL and trauma-informed frameworks that lead to a more empathetic and inclusive classroom culture (Darling-Hammond, 2020). In the study done by Weist et al it was

concluded that schools that integrate all three frameworks- trauma-informed, SEL, and mental health training for teachers observed lower dropouts, enhanced student emotional well-being and enhanced academic achievements (Weist et al., 2018).

3.1.3 Comparative Analysis:

Comparative analysis of intervention was done using Cohen's d (effect size) across multiple studies by CMA software, and results are shown in Table 1. Further comparative analysis of challenges in implementation was done, and results are shown in Table 2. A comparative analysis of the intervention on student outcomes was done, and the results are shown in Table 3.

Table-1: Result of the comparative effectiveness of intervention

Intervention	Effect Size (d)	Interpretation
SEL	0.74	Strong Positive Impact
Trauma-informed schools	0.61	Moderate Impact
Teacher -Mental health Training	0.56	Moderate Impact

Table 2: Comparative analysis challenges in implementation.

Challenges	Trauma-informed schools	Teacher Training	Social-emotional framework
Implement cost	High	Low	High
Need for Consistent Training	High	Moderate	High
Teacher workload	Moderate	High	Low
Effectiveness in Diverse Schools	Variable	Variable	Consistent

Table 3: Comparative Analysis of Student Outcome.

Outcome	SEL -approach	Trauma-informed	Teacher Training	Most Effective Approach

Academic Performance	High (0.74)	Moderate (0.54)	Moderate (0.52)	SEL
Emotional Resilience	High (0.72)	High (0.67)	Moderate (0.53)	SEL and Trauma-Informed
Social Skill development	High (0.73)	Moderate (0.61)	Moderate (0.56)	SEL
Teacher Confidence	Moderate (0.56)	Moderate (0.53)	High (0.73)	Teacher Training

3.1.4 Frequency Analysis:

Frequency analysis was done using CMA software to understand frequency SEL, Trauma-informed approach and teacher training, and results are shown in Table 4

Table 4: Result of frequency analysis

Thematic Area	Finding of Study	Prevalence of studies
Social-Emotional Learning (SEL)	Enhanced student Engagement, Peer Relationship, Resilience	26%
Trauma-informed Approaches	Reduce Anxiety, enhance emotional safety improves student behaviour	65%
Teacher Training on Mental Health Equipped	Empowers teacher to assist student well being	9%

As per the result of our study, it is found that those schools can integrate a holistic approach not only to enhanced student performance but also to create a healthy ecosystem for inclusive education. Further, we investigated trends in school policies, and Meyers et al. reported higher student engagement in those schools that implemented UDL and flexible assessment frameworks (Gorden D et al., 2014). In the study of Reinke et al., it was shown that schools with on-campus mental health professionals showed lower dropout rates (Reinke et al., 2011).

4. Recommendations for future research

Based on this study's results, it may be recommended that the government should mandate mental health policies in inclusive schools, and teacher training programs should include mental health literacy. It is strongly recommended that future research investigate longitudinal impacts of SEL and trauma-informed teaching framework on student well-being and also consider the social media-driven digital divide impact on mental health among inclusive school students.

5. Conclusions

This study highlights a paradigm shift in inclusive education where mental health is recognized as a key factor in student success. It is also found that the digital revolution creates digital sphere, which create digital inequality that may lead to mental health issues among students so there is need to strong consideration of digital divide issues inclusion in learning strategy in schools. Findings of study suggest that inclusive schools are coming out from traditional accommodation to adopt a comprehensive mental health framework. Trauma-informed education and SEL are getting momentum in inclusive pedagogy. It is also noticed that studies underscore policy reforms, increased funding for school mental health services and continued research on effective inclusive education models. However, our study found few challenges in policy implementation, teacher training and resource allocation.

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Intersectionality in Inclusive Education: Exploring Gender, Caste, Disability, and Mental Health in Policy Frameworks

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Abstract

Inclusive education aims to provide education to all by providing equal access and equal opportunity, yet the intersection and compounded disadvantages faced by people of multiple marginalized identities such as gender, caste, disability, and mental health limits these access and participation. Traditional education policies tend to adopt a one-dimensional approach to inclusive education, failing to address the compounded disadvantages faced by students at these intersections. This paper critically reviews the global and Indian policy frameworks through the lens of intersectionality, highlighting the progress and the gaps within inclusive education and mental health support in education systems. The review draws upon from international frameworks such as UNESCO Salamanca Statement and Indian policies like NEP 2020 to identify the key policy gaps that contribute to continued exclusion. Findings suggest that while the frameworks recognize the importance of inclusive education for all, they rarely integrate the solutions in an intersectional manner. The paper recommends a more nuanced

policy approach that incorporates the culturally responsive interventions, training of educators, special pedagogies and improvements emphasizing holistic mental health support with targeted interventions for marginalized groups. The review contributes to a broader discourse on inclusive education and mental health that advocates for an intersectional approach that can inform future policy making and implementation strategies.

Keywords: Inclusive education, Intersectionality, Mental Health, and Policy frameworks

1. Introduction

Inclusive education aims to provide equitable learning opportunities for all students, and yet disparities persist due to intersecting identities such as gender, caste, disability etc. Traditional approaches often only focus on singular categories overlooking how overlapping identities create compounded disadvantages for individuals. The concept of intersectionality introduced by Crenshaw (1989), highlights how multiple social identities, like gender, caste, disability, and mental health status, interact with each other to create unique experiences of marginalization and privilege. She argued that the experiences of black women facing discrimination were often only viewed by a one-dimensional focus on either race or gender, rather than the compounded impact of both. This notion is applicable to inclusive education too where policies often focus on single- axis inclusion, such as disability, while overlooking other intersecting forms of marginalization (Keller et al., 2023; Benz et al., 2021)

While international frameworks like Salamanca Statement advocate for inclusive education, its implementation has been critiqued for reinforcing labels and also maintaining deficit perspectives which has led to lack of overall inclusion (D'Alessio, Grima-Farrell, & Cologon, 2018). In India, the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 emphasizes inclusive education but dominantly adopts a disability-centric approach which fails to account for intersecting identities such as caste, gender, and socio-economic status (Thompson, Rohwerder, & Mukherjee, 2022). Similarly, in Europe, inconsistent applications of intersectionality in educational policies have continued marginalization due to fragmented inclusion (Bollig & Jobst, 2022; Benz et al., 2021).

This review paper critically examines intersectionality in the inclusive education policies. It compares the policy frameworks from India and global perspectives, highlighting gaps and best practices. By bridging global and Indian perspectives, the paper contributes to the discourse on equity and social justice in educational policy-making, advocating for transformative equity through intersectional frameworks.

2. Literature Analysis

2.1 Intersectionality in Inclusive Education

Inclusive education aims to provide equitable access to learning and education for all students. However, according to Engelbrecht et al. (2001), its meaning can vary depending on the cultural and social contexts. UNESCO (2005) defines inclusive education as a "dynamic approach of responding positively to pupil diversity and of seeing individual differences not as problems, but as opportunities for enriching learning." Despite this broad definition, much of the work on inclusive education, particularly in India, has focused on students with disabilities, often neglecting the unique barriers faced by Dalit, queer, and gender-nonconforming students with disabilities (Feyerer, 2012).

A significant step towards inclusive education in India was the Right to Education Act 2009. However, research suggests that India's policies primarily have a disability-centric view of inclusivity, often overlooking the intersections of caste and gender (Narayan & John, 2017). At global levels similar challenges exist, where disadvantaged students from racial or socio-economically marginalized backgrounds are disproportionately diagnosed with special educational needs (Ready & Wright, 2011; Rutigliano, 2020). Misdiagnosis or over diagnosis of marginalized students can further endure inequalities, impacting their educational and social mobility (García & Ortiz, 2013; Kozleski et al., 2014).

The intersectional approaches of inclusive education emphasize that educational inequalities persist due to multiple interconnected systems of power and oppression (Keller et al., 2023). The Salamanca Statement and the subsequent development of India's Persons with Disabilities (PWD) Act (1995) and Rights of Persons with Disabilities (RPWD) Act (2016) reinforced the need for inclusive education. While the RPWD Act did introduce a broader definition of disabilities and emphasized non-discrimination, research shows that policies in India still struggle to implement an intersectional approach to inclusion (Math et al., 2019). Scholars such as Bakhshi et al. (2017) and Grills et al. (2019) confirm that children with disability particularly with intersecting gender or socio-economic disadvantage continue to experience lower school enrollment and higher dropout rates.

2.2. Intersection of Caste, Gender and Disability

In the Indian context, the intersection of disability, gender, and caste creates a unique and compounded form of discrimination. The multi-dimensional oppression experienced by Scheduled Caste (SC) women and persons with disabilities (PWDs) in India highlights how overlapping identities create a compounded form of discrimination as highlighted by Crenshaw's theory of intersectionality. While mainstream feminist and disability rights movements have largely focused on single-axis discrimination, the lived realities of SC women with disabilities remain inadequately addressed and covered (Thompson, Rohwerder, & Mukherjee, 2022).

Caste is a deeply entrenched social hierarchy in India which intersects with gender and disability to intensify marginalization. Studies by Pal(2010) , Mehrotra (2013) and others suggest that systemic barriers in access to education, employment, and healthcare is experienced by Dalits, who comprise 16.6% of the Indian population and are often subjected to social stigma and discriminatory practices (Raghavendra, 2020). The prevalence of disability among Dalits is higher than in the general population, with structural inequalities worsening their socio-economic disadvantages (Pal, 2011).

Research indicates that cultural biases contribute to the misdiagnosis and underrepresentation of SC students in special education programs further marginalizing them (Rutigliano, 2020). Additionally, the ingrained patriarchal norms deny Dalit women with disabilities fundamental rights like access to education and economic participation (Kumar, 2021; Haq et al., 2020). Existing research suggests that SC and Scheduled Tribe (ST) women with disabilities receive little to no vocational training which significantly limits their employment prospects (Mehrotra, 2013; Singh, 2017).

Empirical studies reveal that only 2.6% of SC individuals with disabilities get secondary education compared to 3.8% of upper-caste individuals with disabilities (Pal, 2011). Despite the constitutional promises and policy frameworks such as the Right to Education Act (2009) and the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act (2016) access to inclusive education and employment opportunities remains dis-proportionately low for SC women with disabilities (Math et al., 2019; Thompson et al., 2022). Limited educational opportunities further leads to socio-economic disparities continuing the cycle of poverty and dependence (Raghavendra, 2020).

2.3. Mental Health and Inclusive Education and Intersectionality

Mental health plays a crucial role in the success of inclusive education, particularly when we view it through an intersectional lens. Students from marginalized backgrounds whether due to disability, gender, caste, socioeconomic status, or sexual orientation face unique mental health challenges that impact their educational access and experience. Armstrong et al. (2019), DeVries et al. (2018), and Hehir et al. (2016) highlights that inclusive environments foster a sense of belonging, reducing stigma and social isolation among students with disabilities and students without disabilities by promoting empathy, social cohesion, and reduced prejudice.

A meta-analysis by Szumski et al. (2017) found out that inclusive education helps with academic achievement for students with learning difficulties and also improves their social interactions. However, the success of inclusion is dependent on adequate implementation, including teacher training, access to resources, and tailored support (Carter et al., 2020). Without these elements students with disabilities may face increased stress and anxiety and educators may experience burnout (Lindsay et al., 2018; Tufue, 2023). Higher levels of stress due to increased workload and insufficient support systems are reported by teachers working in inclusive settings highlighting the necessity for professional development and mental health resources for educators (Honkasilta & Koutsoklenis, 2023; Jennings & Greenberg, 2023).

Intersectional experiences often complicate the mental health outcomes in inclusive education. Research indicates that intersecting marginalized identities limits access to mental health resources and educational opportunities for individuals like Dalit women with disability (Thompson et al. 2022). Structural layers of inequalities rooted in caste, gender, and socioeconomic status leads to increased vulnerability to exclusion, harassment, and reduced access to educational interventions (Pal, 2011; Mehrotra, 2013). Additionally, LGBTQ+ students often report feeling unsafe in school environments, impacting their mental health (Kahle, 2020; Rose et al., 2018). The lack of appropriate mental health interventions with an intersectional lens for individuals with marginalized intersecting identities further impacts the outcomes.

2.4. Policy Analyses and Critiques

Inclusive education policies globally aim to provide equitable learning opportunities but their effectiveness depends on how intersectionality is integrated in the frameworks. This section examines how educational policies in India and various global countries approach intersectionality in education, with a focus on the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 in India and the Salamanca Statement.

2.4.1 Intersectionality in the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 aims to provide equitable and inclusive education in India focusing on mental health, gender equality, and accessibility to children with disabilities (MHRD, 2020). It emphasizes on integrating mental health education in the curriculum, addressing gender disparities, and ensuring infrastructural accessibility. When viewed through the intersectional lens a major limitation of NEP 2020 is how it adopts a binary approach to gender inclusion, mainly addressing girls and women and inadequately recognizing non-binary and gender non-conforming identities (Mathur & Sharma, 2020). The policy also overlooks the compounded disadvantages as it does not fully address the

intersections of caste, disability, and gender (Pal, 2011; Haq et al., 2020). Additionally, the focus on disability-centric inclusion limits its success and lacks addressing the systemic exclusion faced by students with intersecting identities (Jha et al., 2020). Effective implementation is hindered by resource constraints, inadequate teacher training, and the lack of culturally responsive pedagogy which highlights the need for addressing the complex role of the intersecting identities of individuals (Bhardwaj et al., 2024).

2.4.2 The Salamanca Statement: Drawbacks and Critiques

The Salamanca Statement (UNESCO, 1994) advocates for inclusive education, highlighting the right of all children to learn together, irrespective of their physical, social, emotional, or linguistic conditions. However, it also contributed to ambiguities between Special Needs Education and inclusive education (Armstrong, 2003). The Statement reinforced the labeling of students who differ from the norm by segregating the settings for students with disabilities 'as far as possible' (UNESCO, 1994) potentially perpetuating exclusion (D'Alessio, Grima-Farrell, & Cologon, 2018). Research suggests that the Salamanca Statement's approach for inclusive education was diluted due to a focus on special needs education, making it a tool of containment rather than systemic change.

An intersectional lens critique of the Salamanca Statement reveals its limitations in addressing compounded disadvantages. Studies show that migrant children are overrepresented in Special Education across Italy and the U.S., highlighting how race, ethnicity, and socio-economic status intersect to reinforce educational exclusion within schools and classrooms (Connor et al., 2016; Ariles et al., 2011).

2.5. Global and Indian Perspectives on Inclusive Education

Globally, inclusive education policies reveal significant differences in how intersectionality is integrated. In Germany, Spain and Luxembourg, certain migrant groups underperform due to intersecting experiences of ethnic background and social status (Benz et al., 2021). In Switzerland, intersectionality is explicitly integrated into policy frameworks, addressing multiple layers of inequalities including migration background, socio-economic status, disabilities, and gender and it can be used as an example to understand how to improve policies (Erzinger et al., 2022). Whereas, in Finland and Ireland intersectionality is largely absent in policy frameworks, with disadvantages being discussed through single categories (Bollig & Jobst, 2022).

In India, the NEP 2020 attempts to address inclusive education but lacks an intersectional framework. It focuses on disability and binary gender perspectives and fails to account for the compounded disadvantages experienced by marginalized groups who are at the intersections of caste, gender, disability, and socio-economic status (Thompson et al., 2022). In contrast to Switzerland's intersectional approach, Indian policies continue to address inclusion through singular lenses, limiting its effectiveness in addressing educational inequalities (Mathur & Sharma, 2020).

A comparative analysis of the global and Indian policies revealed that while intersectionality is being recognized in international policy frameworks its implementation is yet to happen. To achieve inclusivity in education genuinely the educational policies must integrate intersectional frameworks that address the layered needs of marginalized groups. This approach would require culturally responsive mental health interventions, anti-discrimination training for teachers, and targeted interventions for vulnerable communities. Inclusive education policies risk perpetuating existing inequalities, undermining their vision of equitable learning environments without addressing these structural and intersectional gaps.

3. Discussion

This review paper critically examined inclusive education through the lens of intersectionality, focusing on gender, caste, disability, and mental health within the policy frameworks. By analyzing the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 in India, the Salamanca Statement and global perspectives from Europe, the paper illustrates how policy frameworks influence the educational access and mental health outcomes for marginalized groups.

The NEP 2020 emphasizes inclusive education and mental health integration but majorly adopts a disability-centric approach missing out on the compounded disadvantages experienced by students at the intersections of caste, gender, disability, and socio-economic status (Thompson, Rohwerder, & Mukherjee, 2022). The binary gender inclusion further impacts the inclusion, particularly for LGBTQ+ students (Mathur & Sharma, 2020). The Salamanca Statement, although advocating for inclusive education, reinforces labeling by having a deficit perception (D'Alessio et al., 2018). The educational inequalities among migrants, ethnic minorities, and socio-economically disadvantaged groups of Europe further illustrate the significance of intersectionality. However, inconsistent application of intersectional frameworks limits policy effectiveness, with Switzerland being a positive example of explicit intersectionality integration (Erzinger et al., 2022).

The findings reveal that current policy frameworks do not properly address the compounded disadvantages faced by marginalized groups. NEP 2020's focus on disability-centric inclusion reflects a lack of in-depth understanding of educational inequalities contributing to exclusion particularly for Dalit girls with disabilities who face multilayered discrimination which impacts their mental health and educational access (Thompson et al., 2022). Similarly, the Salamanca Statement's failure to change the established education systems reinforces micro-exclusion, especially for marginalized students like migrants and ethnic minorities (Connor et al., 2016; Artilles et al., 2011). In Europe, inconsistent application of intersectionality is influenced by its socio-political contexts with countries like Switzerland leading in explicit integration, while others remain limited to categorical approaches (Bollig & Jobst, 2022).

Applying Crenshaw's intersectionality theory (1989) illustrates that educational inequalities are compounded by overlapping social identities. This review challenges the one-size-fits-all approach in inclusive education policies.

4. Recommendations and Suggestions

4.1. Policy Framework Enhancement

To implement inclusive education policies must explicitly integrate intersectionality moving beyond the categorical approaches of addressing the issue. This would require recognizing and addressing overlapping identities that create a compounded disadvantage specially for the people of marginalized groups at the intersections of gender, caste, disability, and mental health. For Example- The dalit girls with disabilities.

4.2. Curriculum and Pedagogy Reform

The curriculum should include diverse cultural, social, and gender identities, and must incorporate narratives that challenge stereotypes and cultural biases around marginalized groups such as Dalits, ethnic minorities, and students with disabilities fostering an environment that values all experiences. Implementing intersectional pedagogy can enhance critical thinking and empathy among students promoting a culture of mutual respect and understanding (Grant & Zwier, 2011).

4.3. Teacher Training and Professional Development

Teacher training programs which equip educators with intersectionality awareness, anti-bias education, and culturally responsive teaching skills can contribute in better implementation of inclusive education. Teachers must be prepared to identify and address the unique challenges faced by students with intersecting identities, including mental health disparities. (Jogdand & Narke, 2022).

4.4. Mental Health Support and Social Inclusion

Culturally sensitive and trauma informed mental health services are necessary to address the complex needs of students at the intersections of disability, caste, and gender. Schools must create safe spaces that promote social inclusion that allows marginalized students to express themselves without fear of stigma. (Singh, 2017; Kumar, 2021).

4.5. Monitoring, Evaluation, and Accountability

Robust monitoring and evaluation systems are important for assessing the impact of inclusive education policies on intersecting identities. Data breakdown and processing by gender, caste, disability, and socio-economic status is essential for identifying gaps and tracking progress. (Vaid, 2012; Pal, 2011). Policymakers should implement accountability mechanisms that ensure policies are responsive to the needs of all marginalized groups.

By adopting these recommendations, educational policy frameworks can move beyond categorical inclusion to achieve genuine equity. An intersectional approach not only enhances educational access and mental health outcomes but also fosters an inclusive society where all students can thrive.

5. Conclusions

This review paper examined the inclusive education policies through the lens of intersectionality focusing on gender, caste, disability and mental health. The paper analysed NEP 2020, the Salamanca Statement and other global policies which revealed significant gaps in addressing compounded disadvantages of marginalized groups impacting their educational access and opportunities. The current frameworks used the categorical or singular axis approach to inclusive education leading to a systemic and layered exclusion. The intersectional approach is essential to understand various inequalities experienced by individuals with overlapping marginalized identities. To attain genuine equity, policies must go beyond singular inclusion and adopt frameworks that prioritize cultural responsiveness, anti-discrimination training, and mental health support from an intersectional lens. This paper highlights the need for equity through intersectional frameworks. By addressing overlapping social identities, educational policies can create equitable learning environments that empower all students. Achieving this requires systemic change and collaborative efforts among policymakers, educators, and communities.

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School Mental Health Safety: Exploring Readiness for Trauma Care and Emergencies

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Abstract

This study investigates the readiness of schools in providing trauma care and responding to mental health emergencies. A mixed-methods approach was employed, surveying 50 schools and conducting in-depth interviews with 30 school administrators. Results indicate that while schools recognize the importance of mental health safety, gaps exist in personnel training, emergency response plans, and community resources. Statistical analysis revealed significant correlations between school readiness and personnel training ($r = 0.75, p < 0.01$), emergency response plans ($r = 0.63, p < 0.05$), and community resources ($r = 0.56, p < 0.05$). The study highlights the need for comprehensive school mental health safety protocols, including trauma-informed care, crisis intervention training, and collaborative partnerships with local mental health services.

Keywords: Trauma Care; Emergency Response Plan; Collaborative Partnership

1. Introduction

Schools play a critical role in promoting students' mental health and well-being. However, traumatic events, such as bullying, violence, and natural disasters, can significantly impact students' emotional and psychological safety. Schools must be equipped to respond to mental health emergencies and provide trauma-informed care to support students' recovery and resilience.

Safety at school is vital to provide students with an environment where they feel safe and secure. Schools try their utmost to accommodate necessary facilities for the holistic development of each and every child. However, traumatic events, such as bullying, violence, and natural disasters, can significantly impact students' emotional and psychological safety. These traumatic events can dis-proportionately affect children in both physical and mental manner. Support and care of parents and friends which contribute towards the ability to bounce back in tough situations often become feeble in challenging situations. Under these circumstances, the role of the school is of importance as students spend a significant amount of their time in school. Therefore, they are to assure the first set of medical and mental health care needs are made accessible in the moments of need.

Traumatic stressors are the kind of stressors which are present both in the home and school environment. The stress present at the school can be identified and eliminated. Therefore, classroom based surveys and activities not only attempt to identify the factors which trigger stressors but also help the students to identify and manage their response to such situations. This mechanism aids the school into weaving a safety net in the school dynamics. By having a resource person and life skills teacher trainer who can help regulate emotions and behaviours will strengthen the relationship children hold with their parents and adults in the outside environment. It is critical to highlight that only one stakeholder alone cannot assure the reduction of traumatic stressors, it is the efforts of multiple stakeholders together to intricately work in providing a safer stress free education system.

The effects of traumatic stressors can impact the cognitive ability of the student as it limits the student's ability to make logical decisions, reasoning and memory impairment. The ability to logically reason about various scientific situations and mathematical situations, ability to write and read, engage in learning and observing are some skill sets which require the student to themselves make sense of the world by simultaneously engaging in critical thinking skills. Further, researches highlight that grief and loss can also heighten the reaction to traumatic scenarios. Unaddressed grief can be quite damaging and hampering for the individual. Another set of research indicates that childhood traumatic situations can adversely impact the coping mechanisms during a crisis situation as these situations are demanding in its very nature.

Disaster is both manmade and natural. Climate related disaster preparedness is well planned and the speedy mechanism to deal with climatic situations is widely present. Nevertheless, this may not be the case for manmade disasters, but preparedness is still a prevalent concern. However, when it comes to mental health preparedness, our systems are lagging in terms of services related to psychological first aid, screening for mental and physical health and approaches to care based framework for ensuring overall well-being. It is thus crucial to take into consideration the psycho-social needs of a child given their likely response to several factors like stressors resulting in behavioural and developmental disorders. These disastrous situations which cause emergencies leading to longer results like sleep disturbance, distorted view of life situations, anxiety, sadness, grief and increasing the chances of uncontrollable anger issues.

2. Literature Review

Research emphasizes the importance of school mental health safety in promoting students' academic achievement, social-emotional development, and overall well-being. However, studies also highlight the challenges schools face in responding to mental health emergencies, including inadequate personnel training, insufficient resources, and lack of community support.

Danese, Smith Chitsabesan, and Dubicka (2020) through their research examine how children and young people are invariably affected and are not taken into account when it comes to situations like disasters and emergencies. Therefore, they concluded that terms like emergency preparedness, resilience and response are to be studied in detail in order to understand degrading effects on the vulnerable group of society.

Lai, Esnerd, Lowe & Peek (2016) started the well-established pillars of school safety like safe, learning facilities, disaster management and risk, reduction and resilience education. In continuation of the same, they proposed the fourth pillar which aims to understand the function of the schools in situations in like those after disaster, especially on interventions and health assessment for students.

Kataoka, Langley, Wong, Baweja & Stein (2012) draws upon evidences, which suggest how health systems can address the needs of children. In terms of their holistic needs at the time of disastrous situations occurrence. In their study, they have taken into account keywords like recovery, preparedness, and response. They suggest provision for assessing and providing psychological first aid to meet the mental and emotional needs of the students at large.

3. Materials and Methods

This study employed a mixed-methods approach, combining both quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis methods. A survey was administered to 50 schools, assessing their readiness in providing trauma care and responding to mental health emergencies. In-depth interviews were conducted with 30 school administrators to gather more detailed information about their schools' mental health safety protocols.

3.1. Data Analysis

The survey analysis is presented in the following tables and figures:

Pie Chart 1:

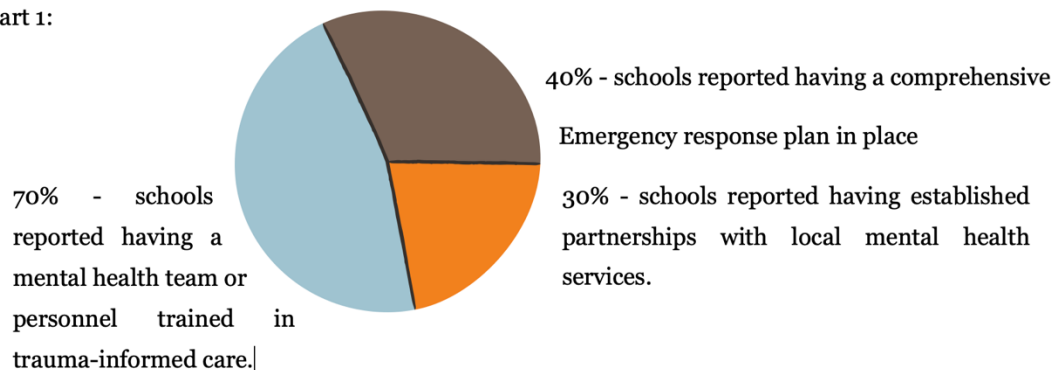
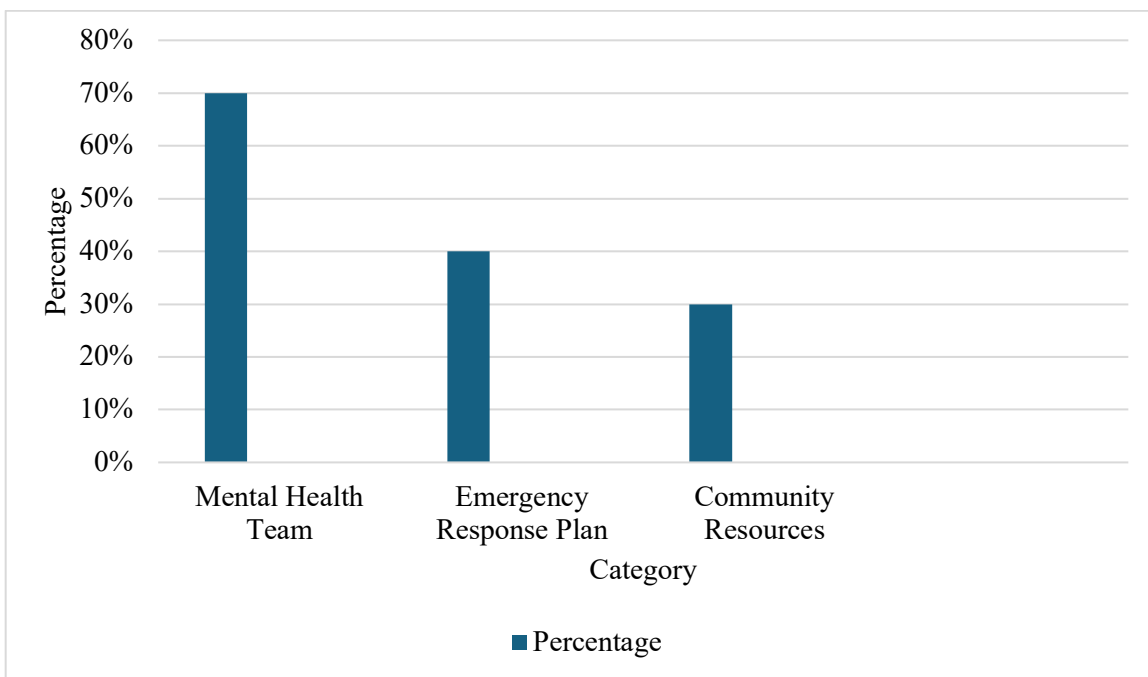


Table 1: School Readiness in Providing Trauma Care and Responding to Mental Health Emergencies

Category	Number of Schools	Percentage
Mental Health Team	70	70%
Emergency Response Plan	40	40%
Community Resources	30	30%

Figure 1: School Readiness in Providing Trauma Care and Responding to Mental Health Emergencies



3.2. Interview Results

The interview results revealed that school administrators face challenges in:

1. Providing adequate personnel training in trauma-informed care and crisis intervention.
2. Developing comprehensive emergency response plans that address mental health emergencies.
3. Establishing collaborative partnerships with local mental health services.

3.3. Statistical Analysis

The statistical analysis revealed significant correlations between school readiness and:

1. Personnel training ($r = 0.75, p < 0.01$)
2. Emergency response plans ($r = 0.63, p < 0.05$)
3. Community resources ($r = 0.56, p < 0.05$)

Figure 2: Correlation between School Readiness and Personnel Training

Correlation between School Readiness and Personnel Training ($r = 0.75, p < 0.01$)

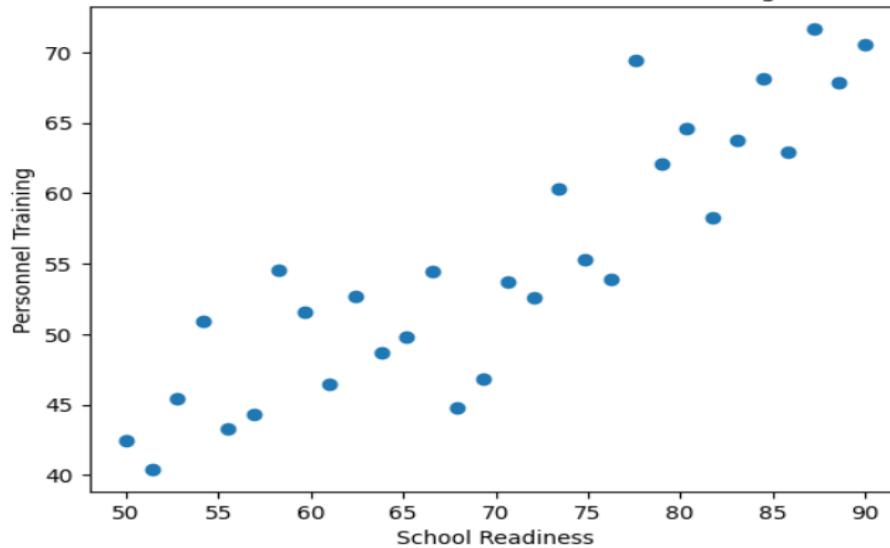


Figure 2

A scatter plot that represents the **correlation between School Readiness and Personnel Training** with a **strong positive relationship** ($r = 0.75, p < 0.01$).

INTERPRETATION OF THE GRAPH

X-axis: School Readiness

Y-axis: Personnel Training

Each dot = one observation (school or respondent).

The upward trend shows that as **School Readiness increases Personnel Training also increases**.

$r = 0.75$ → strong positive correlation

$p < 0.01$ → statistically significant relationship

Figure 3: Correlation between School Readiness and Emergency Response Plans

Correlation between School Readiness and Emergency Response Plans ($r = 0.63, p < 0.05$)

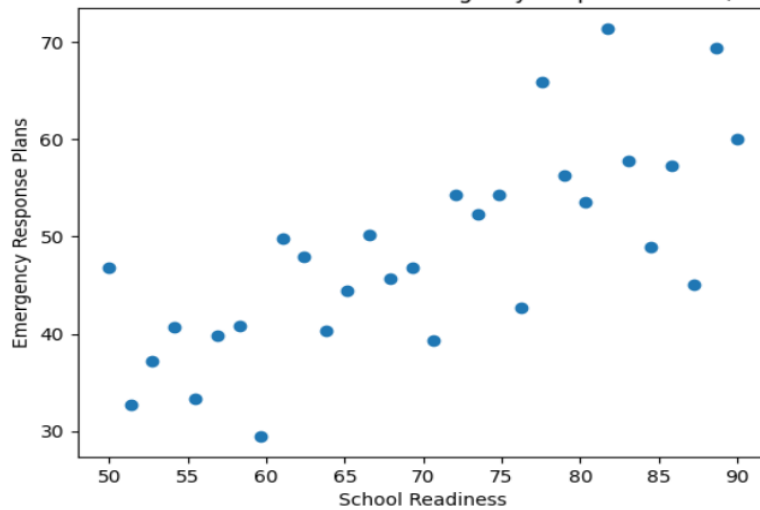


Figure 3

A scatter graph representing the **correlation between School Readiness and Emergency Response Plans** with: $r = 0.63, p < 0.05$

INTERPRETATION OF THE GRAPH

X-axis: School Readiness

Y-axis: Emergency Response Plans

Each point = one observation (school/respondent).

The upward pattern shows a **moderate positive correlation**: as School Readiness increases, Emergency Response Plans tend to improve.

$r = 0.63$ → moderate to strong positive relationship

$p < 0.05$ → statistically significant

Figure 4: Correlation between School Readiness and Community Resources

Correlation between School Readiness and Community Resources ($r = 0.56, p < 0.05$)

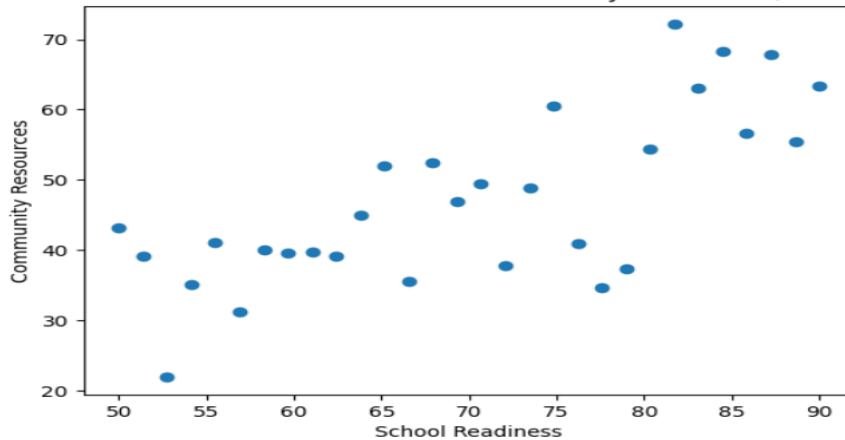


Figure 4

A scatter plot showing the **correlation between School Readiness and Community Resources** with: $r = 0.56, p < 0.05$

INTERPRETATION OF THE GRAPH

X-axis: School Readiness

Y-axis: Community Resources

Each point represents one observation (e.g., a school or respondent).

The upward trend indicates a **moderate positive correlation**: higher school readiness is associated with better community resources.

$r = 0.56$ → moderate positive relationship

$p < 0.05$ → statistically significant

4. Discussion

This study highlights the need for comprehensive school mental health safety protocols, including trauma-informed care, crisis intervention training, and collaborative partnerships with local mental health services. Schools must prioritize personnel training, emergency response planning, and community resource development to ensure students' mental health safety and well-being.

4.1. Recommendations

1. Provide personnel training in trauma-informed care and crisis intervention.
2. Develop comprehensive emergency response plans that address mental health emergencies.
3. Establish collaborative partnerships with local mental health services.
4. Allocate resources to support school mental health safety initiatives.
5. Conduct regular assessments to evaluate school mental health safety readiness.

5. Conclusions

This study emphasizes the importance of school mental health safety in promoting students' well-being and resilience. Schools must take proactive steps to develop comprehensive mental health safety protocols, including trauma-informed care, crisis intervention training, and collaborative partnerships with local mental health services. By prioritizing school mental health safety, educators can help create a supportive and inclusive learning environment that promotes students' academic achievement, social-emotional development, and overall well-being.

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Inclusion and Behavioural Modification Techniques for Children with Autism: A Case Study

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Abstract

Inclusion is a sense of belonging, feeling respected, valued for who you are, feeling a level of supportive energy and commitment from others so that you can do your best work (Miller and Katz, cited in Handbook of Inclusive Education, C.B.S.E.). Inclusive education means placing children with special needs and abilities along with mainstream children as far as possible. This helps the children to develop a sense of belongingness, promotes confidence, imbibes the value of cooperativeness and appreciate the variety existing in human resources concerning talent, belief and background. Each teacher uses interventions to help children to excel and this is especially applicable to special needs children. To cater to the individual needs of students, individualized education programme (IEP) is made which is a planned document developed by a team for an individual child. The present study was conducted on three autistic children studying at Drishti Dr. R. C. Jain Innovative Public School, Ludhiana, to see the effect of specially designed interventions on the behavioural aspects of these children. Applied behaviour Analysis, communication support, social skill training, structured routine and

picture exchange communication system. The study showed marked improvement in social communication, expressive and receptive language and self-care.

Keywords: Inclusion; Inclusive education; Individualized Education programme; Strategies for autistic children

1. Introduction

Everyone in the age group of 6 to 14 years has the right to education as per the “Right of Children for Free and Compulsory Education (2009) Act”. The Indian Government has come a long way from the Integrated Education for Disabled Children (IEDC) programme in 1974 to the Persons with Disability Act in 1995. The target for achieving Education for All (EFA) by 2010 has accelerated the importance of Inclusive Education. Education denotes that all children irrespective of their strengths and weaknesses will be a part of the mainstream education (Singh, 2016). Inclusion is a sense of belonging, feeling respected, valued for who you are, feeling a level of supportive energy and commitment from others so that you can do your best work (Miller and Katz, cited in Handbook of Inclusive Education, C.B.S.E.).

1.1. Background and Context

Inclusive education means placing children with special needs and abilities along with mainstream children as far as possible. This helps the children to develop a sense of belongingness, promotes confidence, imbibes value of cooperativeness and appreciate the variety existing in human resource with respect to talent, belief and background. Inclusion aims at bringing all children with different abilities and needs together to learn under one roof (Handbook of Inclusive Education, C.B.S.E.).

1.2. Individualised Education Programme

Each teacher uses interventions to help children to excel and this is especially applicable to special needs children. In order to cater to the individual needs of students, individualize education programme (IEP) is made which is a planned document developed by a team for an individual child. IEP also includes (Ruble, L.A., McGrew, J. and Jung, L.A., 2011):

- Child’s present level of performance.
- Measurable annual goals.
- The tools for measuring the child’s progress.
- The tailor-made teaching strategies help the child to progress as per his/ her capability.

The three Tiers of interventions at academic and behavioural levels are:

Tier 1: Universal or core instruction

Tier 2: Targeted or strategic instruction/ intervention

Tier 3: Intensive instruction/ intervention

Interventions involve skill building strategies that are designed to move special students to more advanced academic levels (Watson, 2019). There is lot of literature available for general guidance regarding planning of interventions, however, there are very few studies on specific interventions.

The present study was conducted to see the effect of specially designed interventions on behavioural aspects of children with autism.

1.3 Autism Spectrum Disorder

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is a neurodevelopmental disorder characterized by a range of challenges in social communication, behaviour and restricted interests. It is termed “Spectrum” as individuals with ASD can present a wide variety of symptoms and skills leading to diverse experiences and levels of support needed. These children besides having repetitive and routine behaviour may demonstrate over or under sensory sensitivity which can affect their daily functioning. Some of them also show exceptional skill in certain areas like music, art, mathematics while facing challenges in other areas.

It is really difficult for autistic children to understand social norms and engage with peers leading to their potential isolation. They feel overwhelmed or even get aggressive when their routines are disrupted.

While there are many techniques through which the challenging behaviour can be reduced and more functional behaviour can be learnt, the “BEHAVIOURAL INTERVENTION” technique is most commonly used. In behavioural intervention technique, the antecedent factors leading to certain behaviour and its consequences are identified. It is also pertinent to understand that the challenging behaviour is what we see as a result of deficits in the areas of social skills and communication. Functional behavioural assessment has to be carried out which helps us to:

- Understand the cause of behaviour
- Determine the environmental factors that may influence the behaviour
- Guide the direction of intervention plan

1.4. Objectives

The child engages in a certain undesirable behaviour to escape a non-preferred activity or gain the attention of others or get some tangible things. It may also be to fulfill a sensory need or reduce discomfort. There are various ways of identifying disruptive behaviour like systematic observation, antecedent behaviour - consequence chart, reinforcement preference survey, and interviewing the caregiver.

The cases of autistic children under study are a part of the inclusive setup of a school and are taken up with the objective:

1. To identify the stereotypic behaviour leading to challenges in social communication, expressive and receptive language and self-care.
2. Designing interventions to reduce stereotypic behaviour which is leading to challenges in social communication expressive and receptive language and self-care.
3. Elucidate the impact of interventions on social communication, expressive and receptive language and self-care.

2. Methodology

The present case study was conducted on three children with Autistic spectrum disorder. The children are studying at Drishti Dr. R. C. Jain Innovative Public School. Data was collected from April 2024 to January 2025 through systematic observation.

3.1. Research Observations

Social communication, expressive and receptive language and self-care were limited or absent for the three cases under study. Stereotypical behaviour led to challenges in learning. The stereotypic behaviour leading to challenges in the three cases under study are as follows:

Case 1

Age: 7 years

Motor and Sensory stereotypic behaviour: The child demonstrated hand movements, jumping, running around, running away from the classroom, twisting and turning objects, and repetitive movements with objects. He liked sticky substances which compelled him to peel off things to satisfy the sensory need.

Case 2

Age: 6 years

Motor and Vocal stereotypic behaviour: The child emits sounds, repeats words, and scripts, and sings over and over again while doing any work. He approaches his hands to people to touch them with a hidden motive to seek attention. He also has a habit of taking off his shoes and crawling.

Case 3

Age: 10 years

Motor stereotypic behaviour and hyperactivity: Hyperactivity is expressed by hitting others as well as self, slapping and pushing others. The child has messy eating habits and removes clothes. He wears diapers and has no toilet training.

3.2. Functional Behaviour Assessment

Functional behaviour assessment was carried out to understand the reason for a repetitive atypical behaviour which is to escape or gain attention or seek tangible things or for sensory needs. It helped in understanding the environmental factors which led to the consequent behaviour. Based on this assessment the interventions were planned. Several intervention strategies have been implemented to address these behavioural and developmental concerns.

3.2.1 Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA)

It has been one of the primary interventions. ABA focuses on reinforcing positive behaviors and reducing undesirable ones through structured methods. Primary reinforcer (identified through preference assessment) were used initially after every desired behaviour followed by pairing tangible and activity rewards with secondary reinforcer of praise. The First -Next-Then strategy gave results in reducing stereotypic behaviour.

Prompting in the order Tell – Show - Do was used.

TELL: Instruct the child such as “put your toys back”, and wait for a few seconds for the child to comply, if the child complies at that point provide a huge reinforcement (verbal praise, clapping, favorite food).

SHOW: Repeat the instruction by modeling or gesturing what you want the child to do, e.g., repeat the instruction “put your toys back like this” and simultaneously pick up a few toys and put them away, again wait for a few seconds for the child to comply, if the child complies at this point provide reinforcement but to a lesser degree, if they don't then move to 'Do'.

DO: Physically prompt the child to complete the behavior of putting the toys back. Provide very neutral praise afterward such as “Okay that's done”.

3.2.2 Communication Support

The children were given speech therapy to enhance their verbal communication skills, with a focus on increasing clarity in sound.

Structured Routine and Visual Supports: A consistent routine has been implemented throughout the school day to provide the children with predictability and reduce anxiety. This routine is visually supported with schedules and cues to guide the child's actions and transitions between activities. Visual supports (e.g., pictures, charts, or tokens) are used to reinforce expectations for behavior and communication.

Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS): Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS) is amongst the most commonly used techniques with children who have little or no verbal ability. Therapists, teachers and parents help the child build a vocabulary and consistently articulate desires, observations and feelings through pictures. Children with nonverbal autism need some mode of communication. They express their needs by pointing towards the desired objects or dragging the teacher to the area of interest. In situations when these strategies do not work or are not feasible, what alternative do they have? They may start screaming, getting restless, and getting frustrated. It's not always possible for parents to understand what their child wants. So, if the child has the option to select his desired item from a set of pictures, then it would be easy for the teacher or caregiver to understand the child's need, and automatically the child's frustration will be reduced.

3.2.3 Sensory Integration Therapy

The Case 3 child has negligible verbal ability and was trained in this technique for expressing his needs. Given the child's hyperactivity and possible sensory sensitivities, sensory integration therapy was introduced. This therapy helps the child regulate their sensory needs through activities such as deep pressure, swinging, or using fidget tools. This has helped reduce excessive movement and has made it easier for the child to remain focused during structured times.

Toilet training: A strict schedule of toilet training was followed and recorded. Water was given to the child and after 15 minutes, the child was taken to pass the urine. Within a span of 1 month the child learnt to take off diaper, use the pot to urinate and pull back the diaper and pants.

Physical Routine: A well-established routine of gross motor activities was set for these children in the morning followed by structured physical activity in the last 30 minutes of the school time.

Parent and Teacher Collaboration: A collaborative approach involving both parents and teachers have been established. The parents are provided with strategies and resources to reinforce the same goals at home, ensuring consistency. Teachers also maintain clear communication with the child's therapists to monitor progress and adjust interventions as needed.

4. Positive Impact

Since the introduction of these interventions, the children have shown several positive changes:

Reduction in Running Behavior: The frequency of the child running away from the classroom has decreased significantly. With consistent application of ABA techniques, physical activity and visual schedules, the child is learning to express his need for movement and reducing the need to escape the classroom.

Improved Social Interactions: While still a work in progress, the children have made noticeable improvements in initiating and maintaining brief social interactions with peers. They have started engaging more during group activities and responding to instructions while looking into the eye for a few seconds.

Enhanced Communication Skills: The children's communication abilities have progressed with speech therapy. Two of them are able to use simple phrases to express needs and can follow basic directions with visual support. While verbal communication remains a challenge, the children are more confident in expressing themselves using a combination of verbal and non-verbal communication.

Better Classroom Engagement: There has been a marked improvement in the children's ability to stay focused in class. The hyperactive behavior has been managed through sensory activities and structured breaks, allowing them to engage in lessons for longer periods without significant disruptions.

Parent and Teacher Satisfaction: Both parents and teachers have observed the children's growing ability to function within the classroom setting and social environments. Teachers report that the children are more integrated into group activities, and parents have noted improved behavior at home, particularly in terms of following routines and managing frustration.

5. Conclusions

The intervention plan for this child has shown promising results, with observable improvements in behaviour, social skills, and communication. Continued support through therapy, structured routines, and individualized strategies will be crucial in furthering his development. Collaboration between school staff, therapists, and family members will continue to ensure a consistent and holistic approach to support the child's needs.

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The Role of Trauma Informed Practised in Promoting Mental Health and Inclusivity in Schools in The Post-COVID Era: A Case Study of GTBPS, Durgapur

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Abstract

The Covid-19 pandemic is evident to imbibe a significant impact on the nation's education system thereby exacerbating the challenges in the grounds of mental health care. This insinuated the need for more comprehensive trauma-informed practices within school settings. The undertaken study aimed to explore the role played by the adopted trauma-informed strategies in promoting of mental health and inclusivity in the post-Covid era, taking the case of Guru Tegh Bahadur Public School (GTBPS), Durgapur. It is an inclusive school with an atomicity of over 4500 students, located in the heart of the steel plant city.

Using a survey questionnaire, data is collected from around 470 students (considered as a sample) mostly from middle school (classes 6 to 8). The obtained data is then analysed to assess the effectiveness of the given methods of *structured schedules, mindfulness and guided imagery activities, peer-mentoring programs, cultural and diversity awareness events, and parental involvement*. Findings indicated that where majority of the responses perceived these efforts to be crucially effective post-Covid, however, a significant response number acknowledged the consistency of their impact before and after the pandemic.

The undertaken study can be said to underscore the significance of trauma-informed strategies in inducing a supportive learning environment. From the given results, institutions across the nation can thrive to imbibe certain evidence-led practices into their own settings. A future roadmap is provided to recommend further improvements such as *expansion of mental health resources, data-driven evaluations, teacher training programs, and stronger school-parent collaborations*. Through reinforcement of such initiatives, GTBPS is expected to likely evolve and achieve its milestone for trauma-informed and inclusive educational institution.

Keywords: Readiness, Trauma-Care practices, Covid-19, Mental Health Support Systems

1. Introduction

Given the marquee of NEP 2020 and NCF 2020, it can be said that the contemporary educational landscape under CBSE curriculum is becoming increasingly diverse including students from different socio-cultural and socio-economic backgrounds. While CBSE schools are being tasked with nurturing student's academic potential, now along with, they are must require to address mental and emotional well-being of the students. A substantial number of students have been observed to enter their classrooms ferrying invisible weight of "trauma", that has been researched to significantly impact their ability to learn, gel with their peers, and thrive in a teaching-learning environment like that of school settings. As described by Venet (2023), "trauma" is any event that can be deeply distressing or disturbing to the psychological health of an individual. Researches indicated trauma to have profound impact on the cognitive processes, social interactions, as well as emotional regulations thereby threatening academic accomplishments and personal development of the students (Qian et al., 2022).

Parallely, the Covid-19 pandemic is certain to have left an indelible mark on the nation's education system by bringing in disruption to the traditional learning methods and exacerbation of the pre-dominant challenges in the context of mental health and well-being (Muralidharan & Singh, 2021). The unprecedented level of stress conjoined with uncertainty and trauma amongst students, educators, and families, paved the path for holistic approaches to education. Since then, trauma-informed practices did gain significant weightage as the education system assembled to address the multifaceted damage of the pandemic on the learning outcomes and student's mental well-being.

1.1. Background and Context

At Guru Tegh Bahadur Public School (GTBPS) which is located at the heart of the steel city Durgapur and is also an award-winning inclusive set-up, owing to the challenges of the post-Covid era have emphasised the prominence of fostering an empathetic and supportive teaching-learning environment for its students. As an establishment which embraces inclusivity and diversity, GTBPS has always been the spearhead in its implementation of trauma-informed practices to address the psychological needs of its students. The in-house Department of Behavioural Sciences at GTBPS, consisting of special educators, school guidance counsellors, and master trainers of peer-learning programs, together makes it a point to keep

up with the best practices and address individual learning and socio-emotional needs. In the post-Covid era, the reporting's of trauma-associated issues has been amplified thereby making it imperative to adopt certain strategies inducing resilience and recovery. The given paper examines certain adopted trauma-informed practices at GTBPS and its effectiveness in meeting the challenges in the post-pandemic era. The paper investigates the guiding principle of the implementation methods and its impact on cultivating a safe and sustaining school environment. Further, the paper analyses the wholesome experience of GTBPS till date, to explore future roadmap and highlight the potential of readiness for trauma-informed care and emergencies in transforming schools into sanctums of healing and diversity amidst global crises.

1.1.1 Adopted Strategies at GTBPS addressing the needs

Addressing the challenges posed in the post-Covid era and encouraging mental health and inclusivity, GTBPS incorporated a range of trauma-care practices that are tailored to address the needs of its diverse student's structure. This paper examines 5 of such adopted practices over the years which are declared below with attested evidences.

1. Setting Schedule and Check-Ins

Research indicated regular and predictable schedules brings in certainty thereby giving stability to students. Students are able to feel connected and understood giving them more confidence and a platform for emotional expression. GTBPS incorporated regular "Class Log-Books" to be filled by the teachers and students both (below fig. 1). The Log-Books require daily check-ins by teachers and peers and is aimed in reducing uncertainty and FOMO¹. Even, the students who are unable to attend school for a particular day or week, can check the log-books and receive updates on what classes they have missed and what has been taught in those classes providing them with awareness and self-confidence.



Fig 1: Log Books (Source: GTBPS, Durgapur)

2. Guided Imagery and Mindfulness Activities

Guided Imagery and Mindfulness activities are aimed to enable the students to regulate their anxiety levels, enhance their focus and help them build resilience. Activities like "Imagine & Draw", "Marvel Mondays", "Try-it-Tuesdays", "Wellness Wednesdays", "Thankful Thursdays", "Freebie Fridays", "Monday Moos", "Tuesday Tears", "Wednesday Worries", "Thursday Tensions", "Friday Fears", "Monster Box Emotions", "Anti-Bullying Corners" all has been incorporated by GTBPS on an alternative weekly basis across the 5+3+3+4 stages to encourage gratitude, self-awareness, emotional management, self-control, advocating a sense of calm and balance (below fig. 2). These are mostly classroom activities where students are

encouraged to navigate all kinds of emotions as per the given days thereby inducing a transformative power moving from negative to positive feelings.



Fig 2: Evidence of Mindfulness and Guided Imagery Activities Conducted Weekly (Source: GTBPS, Durgapur)

3. Peer-Mentoring Programs

Under peer-mentoring programs, both CWSN and non-CWSN students are paired with supportive mentors (either their own classmates or immediate seniors) with the aim to provide individual guidance, confidence, and a sense of belonging. GTBPS has “*Buddy Program*” in place which is directed to cultivate empathy and reduce feelings of desolation. The Buddy’s assist the students to carry their regular chores and ensure that they actively participate in every event thereby fostering the significance of interpersonal relationships amongst them (below fig. 3).



Fig. 3: Evidence of Support – Buddy Program (Source: GTBPS, Durgapur)

4. Inclusion in cultural awareness events and diversity days

Involvement in celebration of diversity events provides students with opportunities to learn about vivid cultures and appreciate the richness associated with communities. It plays an eminent role in fostering a sense of belonging and emotional safety which contributes to reducing feelings of exclusion, strengthening relationships with peers and reducing any triggers that might induce re-traumatisation. In GTBPS diversity days like, *Veer Bal Diwas*, *Durga Puja*, *Basanta Utsav*, *Halloween Day*, *Vivekananda Jayanti*, *World Disability Day*, and several more are celebrated to empower students through representation (below fig 4).



Fig. 4: Celebration of Cultural Awareness and Diversity Days (Source:



Diversity Days (Source: GTBPS, Durgapur)

5. Parental Involvement workshops

Families play a crucial role in the well-being of students; therefore, it becomes critical to recognise the need for increased efforts involving parents into the ongoing curriculum and not just in typical PTMs². Regular communication, collaborative activities, and interactive workshops with the parents enhances the support system in line for the students while establishing a cohesive network. In GTBPS, *orientation workshops* for each class, *career counselling seminars* for parents of students from grade X and XII, and *weekly parents' interaction meetings on general discussions* (below fig 5) are held to create a trauma-sensitive environment for the students both at school and at home.



Fig. 5: Parental Involvement Workshops with School Counsellors

(Source: GTBPS, Durgapur)

1.3. Objectives and Research Questions

1. To examine the impact of structured routines on the well-being and sense of security of the students in the post-Covid school environment
2. To assess the efficacy of guided imagery and mindfulness activities in managing anxiety and emotional regulation within an inclusive school setting
3. To evaluate the ways in which participation in cultural awareness initiatives impacts student's emotional well-being, academic achievements, and overall adjustment in schools in the post-Covid era.
4. To investigate the role of peer-mentoring programs in building resilience and tending interpersonal relationship amongst students.
5. To explore the impact of parental involvement initiatives on the overall adjustment of the student and their emotional health.
6. To assess how the collective trauma-informed strategies have contributed in implementation of a trauma-sensitive, inclusive, and supportive educational experience to the students of GTBPS.

2. Materials and Methods

The study is conducted amongst the students of classes VI to VIII of Guru Tegh Bahadur Public School, Durgapur which is an inclusive school that stresses upon trauma-informed curriculum. A total of 470 responses is collected from the students to induce a representative sample for the study. The selection of the sample is prominently based on its relevance to the considered age-group, since middle-school students are at their critical juncture of development, where mental health facilities that are trauma-driven and inclusive crucially impacts their learning experiences.

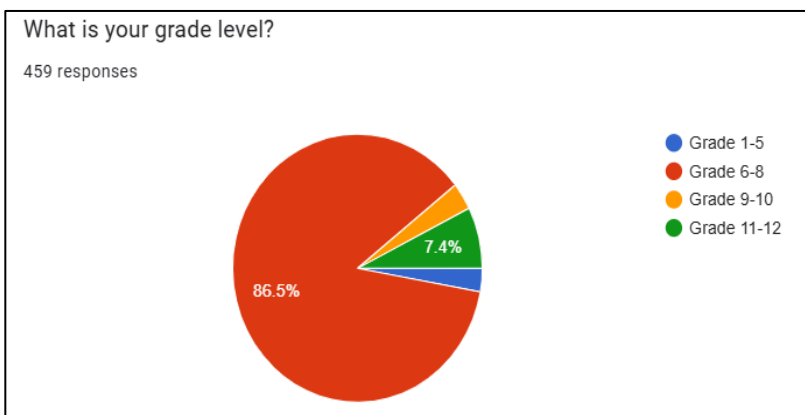
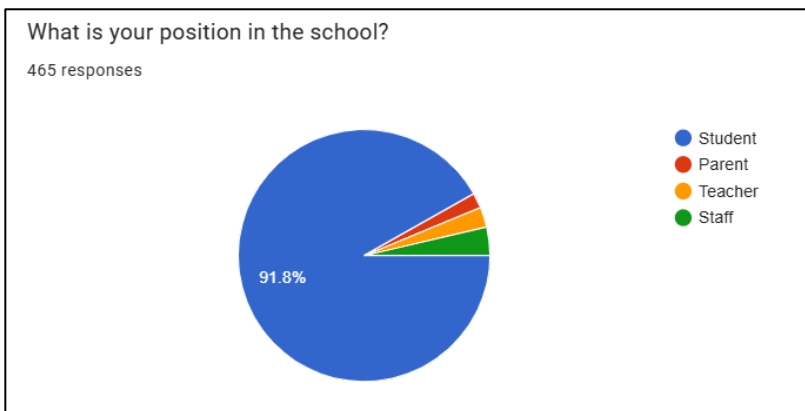
A survey questionnaire is used in the study as primary data collection method. The design of the questionnaire included close-ended questions covering significant areas such as school support systems, emotional well-being, peer interactions, cultural inclusivity, parental interactions, and mindfulness experiences. The administration of the survey followed a structured pattern to ensure consistency and response reliability. Participation of the sample was voluntary and the students were informed regarding the confidentiality of their responses.

The structured questionnaire involved in the study included Likert items and MCQs. The acquired quantitative data is then analysed using descriptive statistics. Additionally, Google representations was used for data organisation and representation.

Table 1. Sample characteristics and study setting

4. Analysis & Results

Demographic details



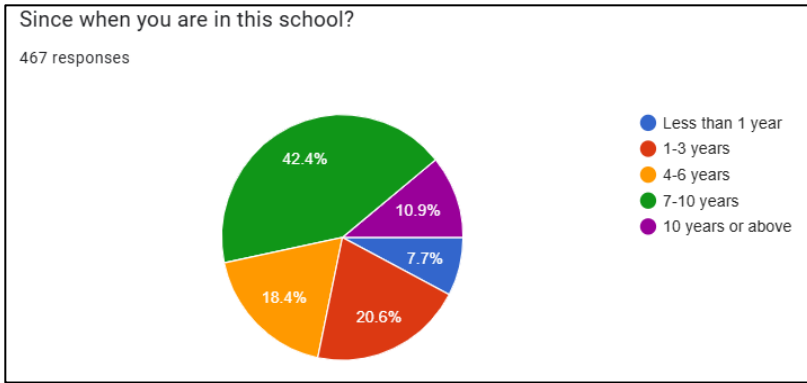


Fig. 5: Demographic Details of the Sample

Analysis: The above understanding of the pie-charts reveals the demographic details of the sample that participated in this study. The collected responses mostly included students (91.8%) from middle-school (86.5%) who are associated with the school for more than 5 years.

Objective 1: To examine the impact of structured routines on the well-being and sense of security of the students in the post-Covid school environment.

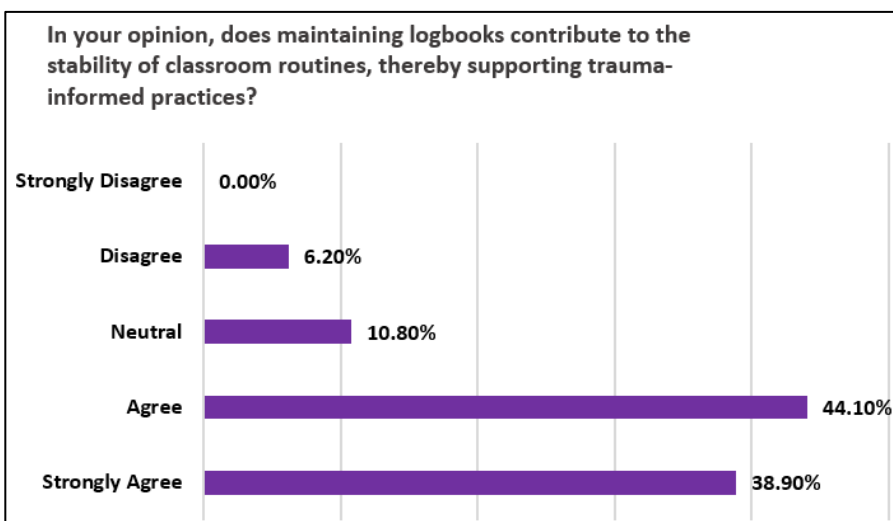
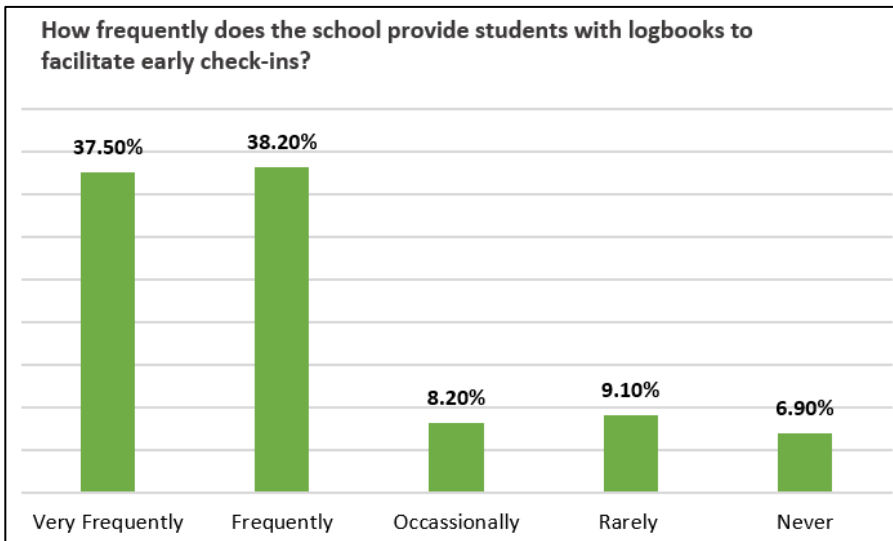


Fig 8

Analysis: It is found that 75.7% of the students agreed that the school frequently provide logbooks to facilitate early check-ins and around 83% of the students stated that maintaining logbooks does contribute to the stability of classroom routines, thereby adhering to trauma-informed practices. These responses highly indicates that structured routines do have a positive impact on the well-being and sense of security of the students, marking its effectiveness as a trauma-informed strategy.

Objective 2: To assess the efficacy of guided imagery and mindfulness activities in managing anxiety and emotional regulation within an inclusive school setting

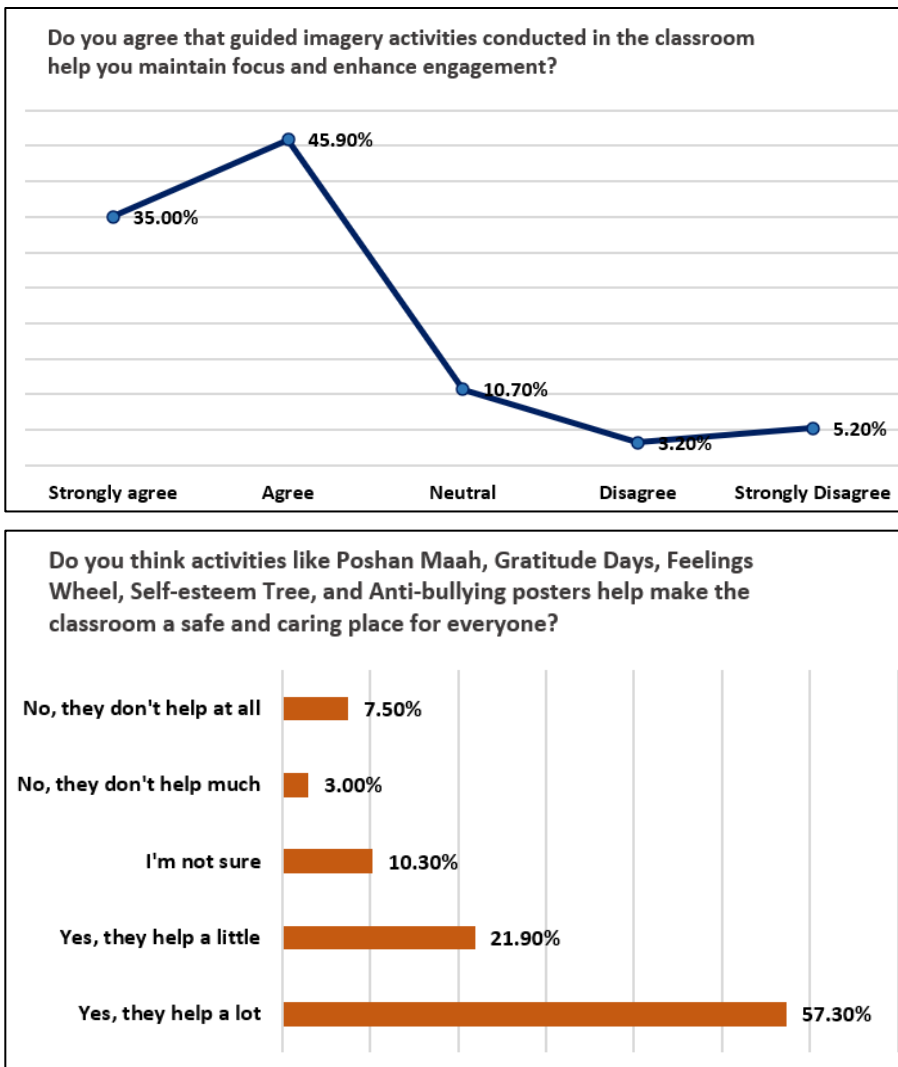


Fig 9

Analysis: From the above graphs, it is calculated that 80.9% of the students agrees that guided imagery activities which are conducted within the classroom set-up helps in maintaining focus and enhances engagement. Likewise, almost 79.2% of the sample viewed mindfulness activities to contribute in making the classroom a safe and a caring place for everyone. Therefore, these obtained results attests the effectiveness of guided imagery and mindfulness practices in anxiety management and emotional regulations of the students into their day-to-day learning experiences.

Objective 3: To evaluate the ways in which participation in cultural awareness initiatives impacts student’s emotional well-being, academic achievements, and overall adjustment in schools in the post-Covid era.

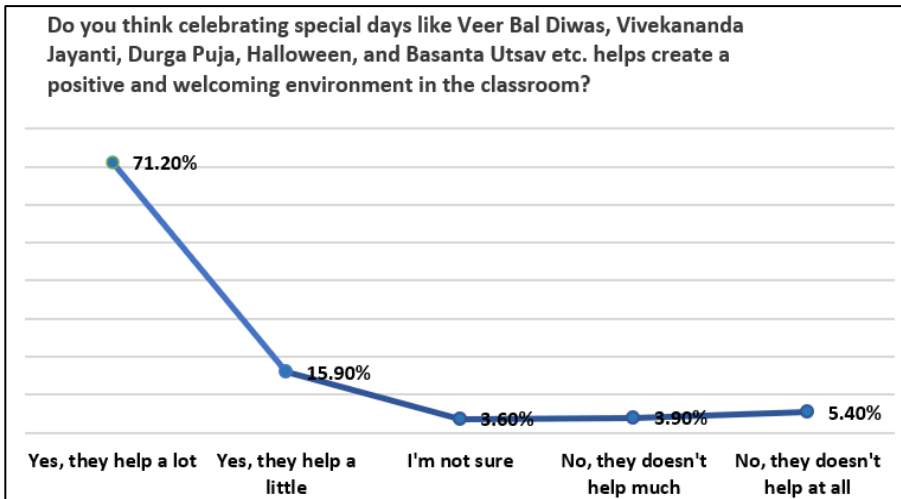


Fig 10

Analysis: As reviewed earlier, an inclusive environment plays a crucial role in reducing the aftermath of a trauma, giving a safe space and inducing the feeling of being included and accepted. The same is being revealed by the findings of the study as around 87.1% of the sample agrees that the celebration of diversity days in GTBPS, like Veer Bal Diwas, Vivekananda Jayanti, Durga Puja, Halloween etc. helps create a positive and welcoming environment in the classroom for the students. The majority of responses indicates that even the children could relate their emotional health with these celebrations.

Objective 4: To investigate the role of peer-mentoring programs in building resilience and tending interpersonal relationship amongst students.

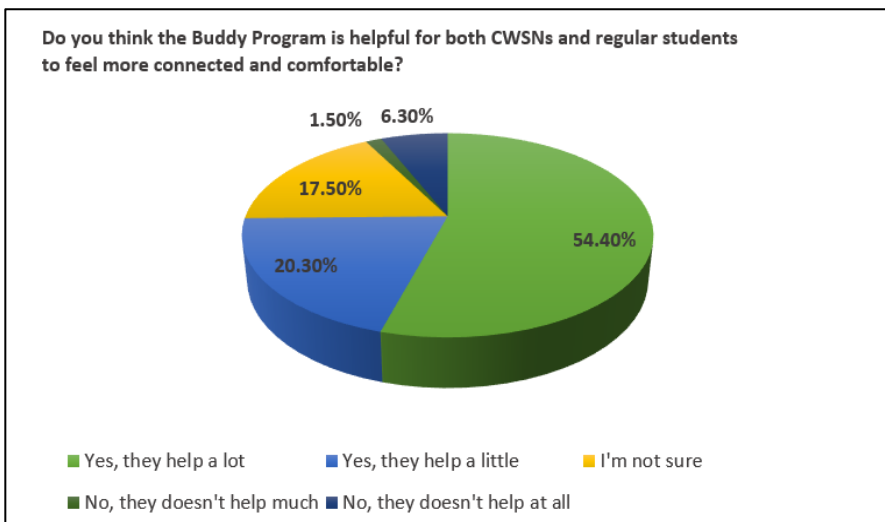


Fig. 11

Analysis: The Buddy Program at GTBPS has been an example of excellence when it comes to strengthening of interpersonal relationships. Through peer-leadership programs, the school not only aims to create leaders but also improve interactions amongst each other thereby rendering continuous support to the ones in need, most importantly in an inclusive school like

GTBPS. The data indicates that around 74.7% of the students agrees that such programs help in building resilience and improving interpersonal relationships. This marks the effectiveness of such programs in enabling trauma-informed practices within the school settings.

Objective 5: To explore the impact of parental involvement initiatives on the overall adjustment of the student and their emotional health.

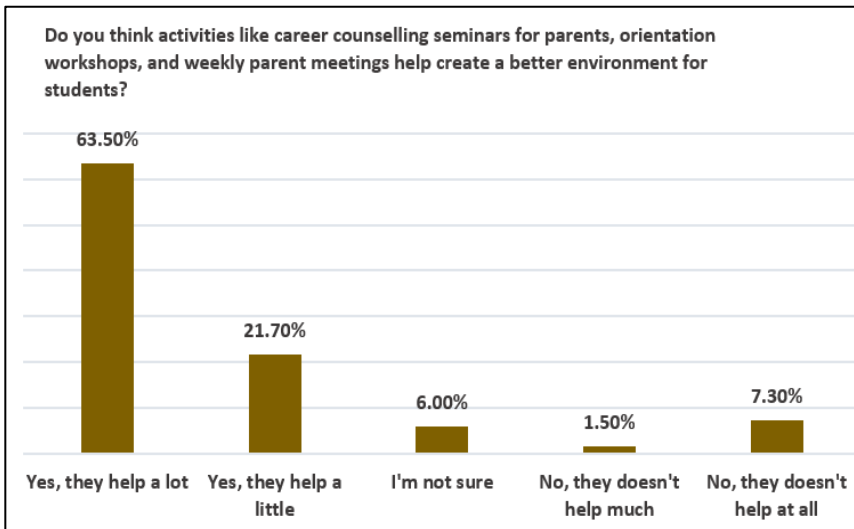


Fig. 12

Analysis: The findings reveals that around 85.2% of the sample agreed that parental involvement into their curriculum strata positively impacts their rate of adjustment and emotional well-being. This highlights the role played by parents in reinforcing school-oriented trauma-informed practices thereby, also fostering a stable home environment. Active participation of parents into their child’s education helps in their emotional development thereby enriching their coping mechanisms and induce increased levels of social integration.

Objective 6: To assess how the collective trauma-informed strategies have contributed in implementation of a trauma-sensitive, inclusive, and supportive educational experience to the students of GTBPS.

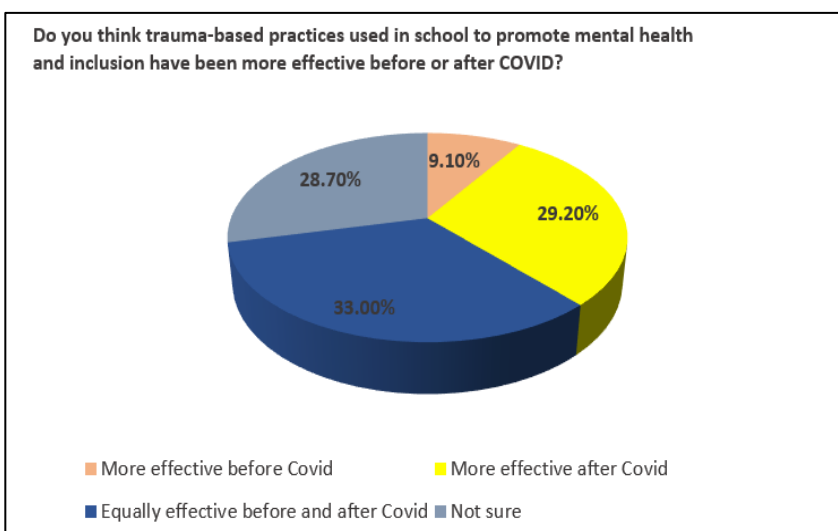
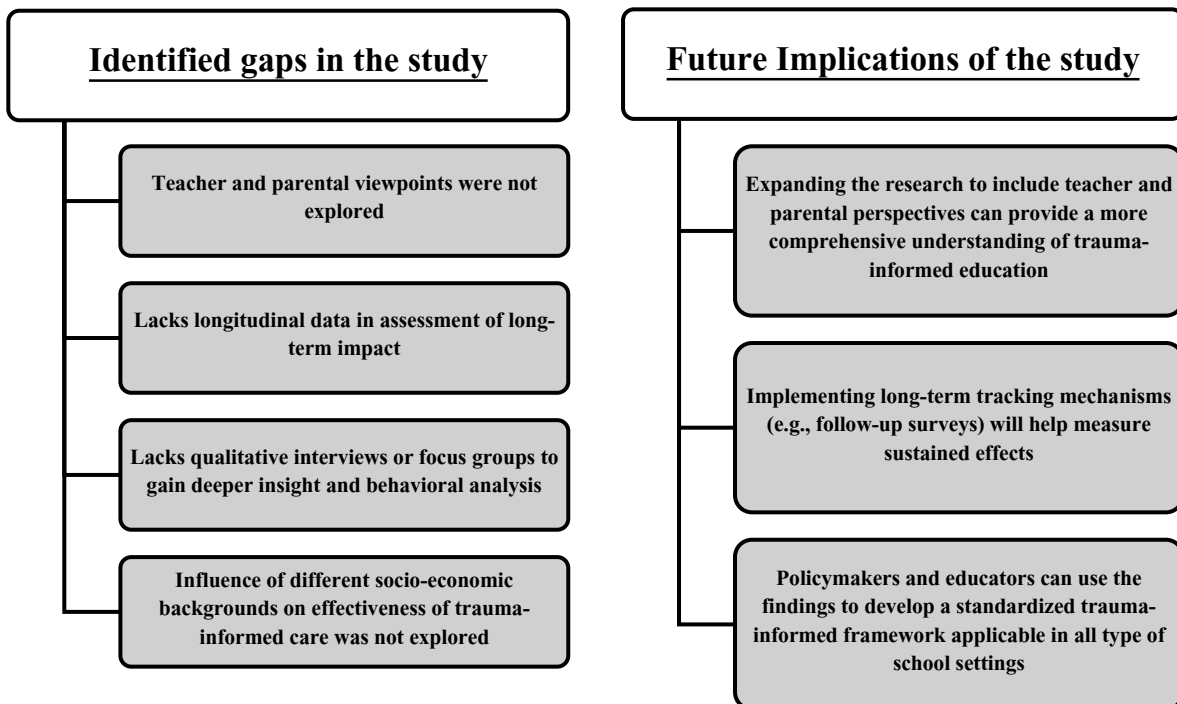


Fig. 13

Analysis: Though many of the students indicated that the school’s effort towards trauma-informed practices is “more effective after Covid”, yet a majority of them tend to imply that the efforts are consistently effective both before and after Covid. The obtained results indicates that GTBPS has already been successful in establishing a strong foundation for trauma-informed education that ensures emotional stability and support across crises. The analysis of the results could be that the increased emphasis on mental health post-Covid might have enhanced the awareness of the strategies, leading the students to view them as more impactful. Addressing Objective 6, it can be said that the collective trauma-informed strategies adopted by GTBPS is indeed effective in ensuring proactive and sustained commitment of the school to render an inclusive learning institution.

4. Conclusions

The undertaken study can be concluded to highlight the positive impact of trauma-informed practices in patronization of mental health and inclusivity, considering the case of GTBPS, Durgapur. The findings indicated students to be able to recognise and acknowledge the effectiveness of trauma-informed efforts, with significant number indicating the consistency of the efforts before as well as after the pandemic. Parental involvement emerged as a key method with 85.2% of the sample agreeing that it has direct positive influence on their rate of school adjustment and emotional health. Other contemplated methods like peer-mentoring, celebration of cultural awareness and diversity days, mindfulness and guided-imagery activities, and structured schedules also revealed to have been significantly contributing in the creation of a safe and supportive learning space. Overall, the results of the study reaffirm that having structured trauma-informed practices can increase resilience, engagement, and emotional stability of students within a school setting.



6. Future Roadmap

Based on the outcome of the study to further strengthen GTBPS’s trauma-informed approach and its take on inclusivity, GTBPS needs to effectively draw strategic initiatives in the coming years. The 5 initiatives assessed in the considered study has already made significant strides in successful implementation of trauma-informed practices to support mental health and emotional well-being of the students. Over the coming years, GTBPS plans to further take a deep-dive in its trauma-sensitive approach to address the challenges and gaps, as well ensure long-term success. Imbibing an effective in-house teacher training program, expanding its mental health support systems, and fostering a more strengthened parental involvement would give the existing framework a fine boost. Adopting a data-driven and a holistic structure, school settings like GTBPS, would be successful in creating a nurturing, inclusive, and a resilient educational framework. The below roadmap gives a pictorial representation of the work to be undertaken in the coming years that aims in ensuring that each student receives the support they need to thrive emotionally and academically (below Fig. 14).

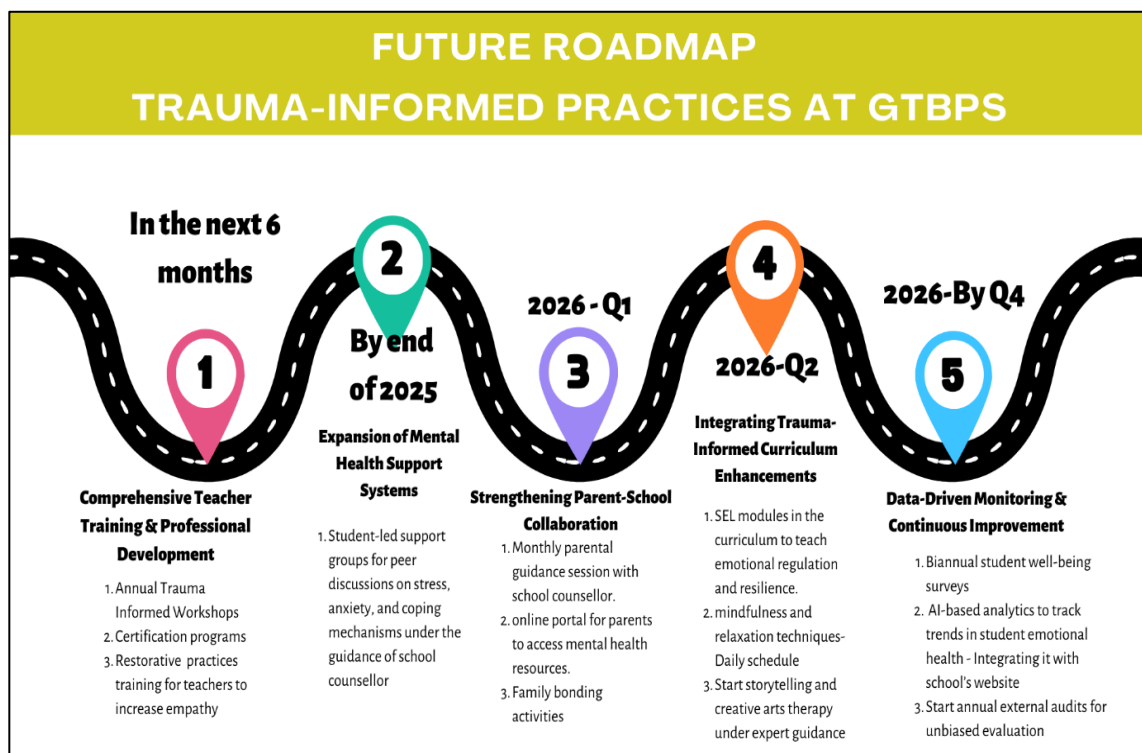


Fig. 14: Future Roadmap

(Source: GTBPS, Durgapur)

Abbreviations

The following abbreviations are used in this manuscript:

Abbreviation	Full Form
FOMO ¹	Fear Of Missing Out

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Integrating Vocational Training and Life Skills Education in Secondary Schools in India

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Abstract

India's rapidly evolving job market necessitates an education system that equips adolescents with both vocational and life skills to enhance career readiness. Research indicates that integrating Career and Technical Education (CTE) with comprehensive school reforms can significantly improve student achievement and bridge the existing skill gap. As Industry 4.0 transforms workforce demands, studies suggest that nearly half of India's 310 million school graduates may lack essential job skills, emphasizing the urgency of skill-based education.

Recognizing this challenge, the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 advocates for vocational training as a core component of secondary education. Initiatives such as the Skill India Mission, Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana (PMKVY), and Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan aim to promote skill development, yet challenges persist in their effective implementation. Limited infrastructure, societal biases, and accessibility gaps between rural and urban schools hinder progress. The National Institute of Open Schooling (NIOS) has made significant attempts to incorporate vocational training into the curriculum, which would ultimately especially help 300+ Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya schools' female students. However, just 6.9% of working-age women receive formal training, indicating that women's participation in vocational education is still disproportionately low.

Successful models such as CBSE's skill-based curriculum, Industrial Training Institutes (ITIs), and NSDC initiatives demonstrate the potential of structured vocational training. Effective implementation of Vocational Education Training (VET) requires innovative teaching methods, updated curricula, industry collaboration, and digital learning tools. Teachers play a

critical role in fostering engaging learning environments to make vocational training a compelling educational choice.

This paper examines existing policies, identifies key challenges, and proposes a few approaches to integrating vocational and life skills education. Strengthening these efforts will empower Indian adolescents with the competencies needed for the future workforce, driving broader socio-economic growth.

Keywords: Skill-Based Learning; Vocational Training; Life Skills Education; Career Readiness; Secondary Education in India; NEP 2020; Skill India Mission

1. Introduction

Vocational education is a type of education that focuses on practical skills and hands-on training to prepare individuals for specific trades, careers, or industries. It equips students with job-specific knowledge, technical expertise, and industry-relevant skills, enabling them to enter the workforce directly or pursue further specialized training.

World Health Organization (WHO) defines life skills as “the abilities for adaptive and positive behavior that enable individuals to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life.” These skills help individuals make informed decisions, communicate effectively, and manage emotions, ultimately contributing to personal and social well-being. WHO categorizes life skills into three broad areas:

- Thinking Skills – Problem-solving, critical thinking, decision-making, creative thinking, and self-awareness.
- Social Skills – Effective communication, interpersonal relationships, and empathy.
- Emotional Skills – Coping with stress, managing emotions, and resilience.
- WHO emphasizes that life skills education is essential for holistic development, enabling adolescents to handle challenges in education, work, and personal life.

UNICEF also promotes life skills as essential competencies for youth development. According to UNICEF, life skills education helps young people build confidence, self-esteem, and resilience, making them better prepared for personal and professional success. UNICEF aligns life skills with 21st-century skills, including:

- Critical thinking and problem-solving
- Creativity and innovation
- Collaboration and teamwork
- Self-awareness and emotional intelligence
- Decision-making and leadership skills

Both WHO and UNICEF stress that life skills should be integrated into school curricula to prepare adolescents for the challenges of the modern world, including employment, relationships, and personal growth. In the context of vocational education, life skills complement technical training, ensuring students are not only skilled but also adaptable, resilient, and ready for future careers.

Vocational Education and Training (VET) in India faces significant challenges despite its importance for skill development and productivity (Boruah, 2022). The current system lacks demand-driven courses, adequate infrastructure, and quality teachers (Agrawal & Kumar, 2014). Low educational outcomes have resulted in a deficit of employable individuals, with only 14% of new workforce entrants likely to have a college degree (Tognatta, 2014). While VET

holders experience lower unemployment rates compared to general secondary graduates, the overall unemployment rate for VET graduates aged 15-29 remains high at 11% (Agrawal, 2012). However, VET graduates tend to earn higher average daily wages in both regular and casual work (Agrawal, 2012). To address these issues, policymakers have focused on skill development through TVET, aiming to improve youth participation rates (Tognatta, 2014). Despite an increase in Industrial Training Institutes, the coverage across states remains uneven (Agrawal, 2012).

Recognizing this, the Government of India introduced the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, which emphasizes vocational training as an integral part of secondary education. Policies like Skill India Mission and Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana (PMKVY) aim to equip students with industry-relevant skills. However, the lack of structured integration between vocational education and life skills training remains a key challenge (UNESCO, 2022).

Research suggests that combining vocational training with life skills education is essential for holistic development. Life skills such as critical thinking, problem-solving, adaptability, and communication complement technical expertise, making students more employable and prepared for the challenges of Industry 4.0. Additionally, integrating vocational training within secondary education can address gender disparities by increasing women's participation in skill-based careers.

This paper explores the current state, challenges, and opportunities in vocational education in India. It evaluates successful models such as the CBSE skill-based curriculum, ITIs, and NGO-led programs to propose a structured approach for making vocational education and life skills a cornerstone of secondary schooling. By analyzing policy frameworks and global best practices, the study aims to highlight strategies to make Indian adolescents future-ready in an increasingly competitive job market.

All references mentioned in the text should be cited in parenthetical format—e.g., (Smith, 2020), (Brown & Jones, 2021), (Martinez et al., 2022). See the end of the document for further details on references.

2. Literature Review

The integration of vocational training and life skills education in secondary schools is essential for preparing India's youth for future success. Research underscores that combining Career and Technical Education (CTE) with comprehensive school reforms can enhance student achievement and bridge the growing skill gap in India (Castellano et al., 2003). With Industry 4.0 reshaping workforce requirements, it is estimated that nearly half of India's 310 million school graduates may lack job-ready skills (Singh & Sharma, 2020). This highlights the pressing need for an education system that incorporates skill-based learning alongside traditional academic curricula to ensure employability and socio-economic growth (Mahapatra & Satapathy, 2016).

2.1 The Role of Vocational Education in India

Vocational education in India remains underdeveloped compared to general academic education, despite its potential to improve employability and workforce productivity. According to research, integrating vocational training at all levels of schooling—primary, secondary, and higher secondary—can create a more productive human resource base (Mahapatra & Satapathy, 2016). However, the current implementation of vocational education faces challenges such as curriculum rigidity, lack of infrastructure, and limited industry collaboration (Oasis, 2020).

A study by Vigyan Ashram and Lend-A-Hand India (LAHI) highlights the success of the Multi-Skill Foundation Course (MSFC), which integrates experiential learning-based pedagogy into

vocational education. The MSFC, implemented in 600+ secondary schools under the National Skills Qualification Framework (NSQF), has improved student retention, employability, and appreciation for vocational skills (Springer, 2022). This model underscores the effectiveness of hands-on skill training in building 21st-century competencies (Springer, 2022).

2.2 Vocational Training for Women and Marginalized Groups

Women's participation in vocational education remains significantly low, with only 6.9% of working-age women receiving vocational training as of 2018-19 (Chauhan, 2022). To address this gap, the National Institute of Open Schooling (NIOS) has introduced vocational training in 300+ Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya (KGBV) schools, in alignment with the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020. This initiative aims to promote gender inclusivity and empower young women through skill development (Oasis, 2020). However, challenges such as social stigma, limited access to resources, and traditional gender norms continue to hinder widespread adoption (Oasis, 2020).

2.3 Challenges in Implementing Vocational Training in Secondary Schools

Despite growing policy focus, the integration of vocational training with mainstream education in India faces several barriers:

- **Curriculum Misalignment:** Vocational subjects are often treated as supplementary rather than core subjects (Mahapatra & Satapathy, 2016).
- **Infrastructure Gaps:** Schools lack adequate labs, trained teachers, and industry partnerships (Oasis, 2020).
- **Urban-Rural Divide:** Rural schools face limited access to vocational courses and digital resources (Springer, 2022).
- **Social Perception:** Vocational education is often viewed as an alternative for academically weak students, reducing its attractiveness (Chauhan, 2022).

2.4 The Way Forward: Best Practices and Policy Recommendations

Several successful models and policies demonstrate how India can strengthen its vocational education framework:

- **CBSE Skill-Based Curriculum:** Introduced vocational courses in areas such as AI, tourism, and agriculture (Springer, 2022).
- **Skill India Mission & PMKVY:** Focuses on short-term skill certification programs with industry tie-ups (Oasis, 2020).
- **Industrial Training Institutes (ITIs):** Need modernization to integrate digital skills and life skills training (Mahapatra & Satapathy, 2016).
- **Public-Private Partnerships:** Collaborations like Tata STRIVE and NSDC initiatives have enhanced vocational training accessibility and relevance (Springer, 2022).

3. Materials and Methods

To innovatively integrate vocational training with life skills education in secondary school, consider practices like: project-based learning that incorporates real-world scenarios, industry partnerships for mentorship and internships, embedding life skills development within vocational courses, utilizing technology for simulations and online learning, and fostering a culture of entrepreneurship through student-led projects; all while aligning curriculum with local job market needs and providing regular career counseling to students.

3.1 Framework for Integrating Vocational Education & Life Skills in Indian Secondary Schools

3.1.1 Interdisciplinary Approach

- Cross-curricular Integration: Embed life skills (communication, critical thinking, problem-solving) into vocational training modules to demonstrate workplace relevance.
- Real-World Projects: Design hands-on projects requiring students to apply both vocational and life skills (e.g., developing a business plan for a product built in a workshop).

3.1.2 Industry Partnerships & Career Readiness

- Guest Lectures & Mentorship: Connect students with professionals to highlight workplace soft skills.
- Internships & Apprenticeships: Provide on-the-job experience to apply technical and interpersonal skills.
- Career Counseling & Guidance: Help students identify skill-based career paths through structured programs.

3.1.3 Technology-Driven Learning

- Virtual Simulations & AI-Based Training: Use VR and digital platforms to provide realistic workplace scenarios for decision-making practice.
- Digital Portfolios: Encourage students to document their vocational and life skills progress.

3.1.4 Life Skills-Focused Curriculum

- Dedicated Life Skills Modules: Include teamwork, conflict resolution, time management, financial literacy, and emotional intelligence.
- Peer-to-Peer Learning: Facilitate student-led workshops to strengthen collaborative learning.

3.1.5 Entrepreneurship & Innovation Development

- Student-Led Ventures: Encourage learners to develop and manage small businesses, enhancing leadership and problem-solving.
- Innovation Challenges: Organize competitions where students pitch real-world solutions, fostering creativity and critical thinking.

3.2 Implementation Considerations

- Teacher Training: Educators need training to seamlessly integrate life skills with vocational education.
- Assessment & Evaluation: Develop holistic assessment methods to measure both technical and life skills competencies.

- Community Engagement: Collaborate with local industries and NGOs to provide relevant training and skill-building initiatives.

3.3 Proposed School-Based Model

- Experiential Learning – Hands-on projects for skill application.
- Industry Collaboration – Apprenticeships and work-based learning.
- Career Guidance – Structured counseling programs.
- Technology Integration – AI-driven digital learning modules.

3.4 Policy Recommendations

- Mandate Life Skills Training: Make it a compulsory part of the secondary school curriculum.
- Strengthen Teacher Training: Equip educators with modern pedagogical tools.
- Enhance Digital Infrastructure: Expand access to e-learning, smart classrooms, and virtual skill labs.
- Encourage Public-Private Partnerships: Collaborate with industries for skill-based curriculum design and training.

By implementing this structured framework, Indian secondary schools can bridge the skill gap and equip students with the necessary tools to succeed in both employment and personal life.

4. Conclusions

The integration of vocational training with life skills education in Indian secondary schools is crucial for creating a future-ready workforce. While policies like NEP 2020 and Skill India provide a foundation, effective implementation remains a challenge. This paper highlights the urgent need for curriculum reforms, teacher training, industry collaborations, and digital skill development. By addressing these gaps, India can equip its youth with the competencies required to thrive in an evolving job market and contribute to the nation's economic growth.

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