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Positioning Vygotsky for inclusive education: A psycho-philosophical context

S. Kumar ✉

University of Delhi, Delhi, India

✉ sandeepkumarcie@gmail.com

Abstract

Inclusion has its roots in two foundational ideas: equity and a rights-based perspective on education, as articulated in national and global policies. However, inclusion, in its true sense, has been misunderstood as helping learners adjust to the mainstream. This misleading idea has raised serious concerns about the essential role of diversity in inclusion. In its narrow terms, the physical arrangements for learners with disabilities have been accepted as inclusion, thereby overlooking the underlying assumptions about development, learning, and diversity that actually shape the discourse of inclusive educational practices. This makes it imperative to lay out the theoretical and philosophical foundations of inclusive education. Vygotsky, while avoiding individualistic and deficit-driven approaches, reframes cognitive engagement as socially mediated and culturally situated processes. Considering diversity an opportunity rather than a barrier in the classroom, Vygotsky emphasises dialectical materialism and the social origins of higher mental processes as vital to cognitive practices. In this context, this discourse analysis-based article revisits the core constructs of Vygotskian theory, such as co-construction, mediation via cultural tools, internalisation, *perezhivanie*, the Zone of Proximal Development, and the shaping of thought with language, to conceptualise inclusive education within this framework. This conceptualisation indicates the positioning of certain essentialities, such as dialogue, scaffolding, collaboration, and interaction with peers, in creating inclusive educational opportunities for all learners. The article also explores the potential to apply Vygotsky's ideas to pedagogical processes, assessment, and teacher preparation, focusing on teachers' roles as mediators in developing supportive, collaborative learning environments. The article concludes by establishing the strength of Vygotsky's theoretical framework in shaping the scope of inclusive education.

Keywords: inclusive education, psychological context, philosophical context

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Роль Л.С. Выготского в инклюзивном образовании: психолого-философский контекст

С. Кумар ✉

Делийский университет, Дели, Индия

✉ sandeepkumarcie@gmail.com

Резюме

Инклюзия базируется на двух фундаментальных принципах — равенстве и правовом подходе к образованию, что отражено в национальных и междунаrodnых политических стратегиях. Однако подлинная сущность инклюзии часто воспринимается искаженно: как приспособление учащихся к существующей системе образования. Подобное заблуждение ставит под сомнение ключевую роль многообразия в инклюзивном процессе. В своем узком понимании инклюзия сводится к физическому включению учащихся с инвалидностью в общеобразовательные классы, что заслоняет собой фундаментальные представления о развитии, обучении и многообразии, которые в действительности определяют характер дискурса инклюзивных образовательных практик. В связи с этим возникает потребность в прояснении теоретико-философских оснований инклюзивного образования. Л.С. Выготский, избегая индивидуалистических и дефицитарных подходов, переосмысляет когнитивную деятельность как социально опосредованные и культурно обусловленные процессы. Рассматривая разнообразие как возможность, а не как препятствие в классе, Л.С. Выготский подчеркивает значимость диалектического материализма и социального происхождения высших психических процессов как ключевых для когнитивных практик. В этом контексте настоящая статья, основанная на дискурс-анализе, обращается к ключевым конструктам теории Л.С. Выготского — таким как совместное конструирование, опосредование через культурные инструменты, интериоризация, переживание, зона ближайшего развития и опосредование мышления языком — для концептуализации инклюзивного образования в рамках данной парадигмы. Подобная концептуализация указывает на значимость таких ключевых элементов, как диалог, скаффолдинг (педагогическая поддержка), сотрудничество и взаимодействие со сверстниками, в создании инклюзивных образовательных возможностей для всех учащихся. В статье также рассматриваются возможности применения теоретических положений теории Л.С. Выготского в области педагогической практики, оценочной деятельности и профессиональной подготовки учителей, уделяется особое внимание функции педагога как медиатора в организации поддерживающей учебной среды. В заключение автор приходит к выводу о продуктивности теории и идей Л.С. Выготского для определения векторов развития инклюзивного образования.

Ключевые слова: инклюзивное образование, психологический контекст, философский контекст

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Introduction

In contemporary times, the most crucial change is a special focus on inclusive education. Human rights, social justice, and educational equity are the core principles of inclusion, ensuring equal learning spaces and opportunities for all, free from bias and discrimination based on class, gender, disability, and other factors. The Salamanca Statement (UNESCO, 1994), the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (United Nations, 2006), and Sustainable Development Goal 4 have provided a strong boost to the conceptualisation of Inclusion, which favours quality and equitable education for all (United Nations, 2015).

Despite its high policy value, inclusion has been narrowly defined in educational practice. Most of the time, it is seen as the process of mainstreaming. This idea embodies an assimilationist view in which students should conform to pre-existing models of education rather than these models adapting to include human diversity. Consequently, the overarching philosophical issues surrounding learning, development, engagement and diversity are left largely unexplored.

The problem is not merely one of access to education but of reconceiving the theoretical bases of educational institutions. Questions about how we learn, how we understand development and how we think about diversity are essential to any meaningful discussion of inclusion. From this perspective, the works of Lev S. Vygotsky are of great value.

Vygotsky's socio-cultural theory offers a powerful critique of individualistic and deficit-oriented views of human development. Vygotsky points to the social origins of higher cognitive functions, the mediating role of culture, and the transformative potential of cooperative learning, thus offering a psycho-philosophical framework that closely aligns with the goals of inclusive education (Vygotsky, 1978). Rather than viewing diversity as a barrier to educational success, he sees it as a valuable asset that enhances collaborative learning opportunities. Social interaction, participation, collaboration, and contextual support across diverse educational contexts are

being emphasised in recent research on Vygotsky's work (Healy, Nardi, Biza, 2024).

This article revisits Vygotsky's theoretical contributions and explores their implications for inclusive education. The article contends that Vygotsky's framework provides a strong basis for understanding inclusive educational practices by examining concepts such as social mediation, internalisation, cultural tools, language, the zone of proximal development (ZPD), *perzhivanie*, and defectology. The article also discusses implications for pedagogy, assessment, teacher education and educational policies.

Methodological positioning: a discourse analysis

The essay draws on a discourse-analytic approach to explore the re-conceptualisation of contemporary understandings of inclusive education through the lens of Vygotskian theory. Discourse analysis is not a linguistic study, but a paradigm for studying the construction of meanings, assumptions, identities, and social realities through particular knowledge systems (Foucault, 1972).

Various philosophical frameworks, including special education, disability studies, human rights, social justice, and critical pedagogy, have shaped the discourse on inclusive education. In these traditions, inclusion has been demonstrated in many ways, and perhaps in ways that conflict. In some contexts, the focus of inclusion is on the physical location of students with disabilities in regular classrooms. It is a revolutionary initiative to reorganise educational institutions to address student diversity from certain perspectives.

Discourse analysis allows scholars to examine the assumptions embedded in these representations. Rather than asking whether inclusion occurs, discourse analysis focuses on how inclusion is defined, whose voices are privileged, and which educational practices are turned on or off by specific understandings of inclusion.

Using the aforesaid methodology, Vygotsky's ideas are reread to develop a conceptual framework that challenges the prevailing and dominant

educational narrative and practices. This rereading is essential for understanding concerns about educational practices, including diversity, normalcy, development, intelligence, and capacity. As the broader focus in education is on individual achievement, standard assessments and deficit-based interpretative mechanisms are used, ultimately creating a pedagogical, achievement-based rhetoric. This perspective treats disability as an individual problem to be corrected.

Needless to say, these ideas are challenged by Vygotsky's research. Concepts such as social mediation, cultural participation, and collaborative learning have helped shift the core concern from individual deficits to the social collective. Revisiting Vygotsky's ideas through discourse analysis offers an opportunity to understand inclusion in relation to socio-cultural context, rather than as a supportive technical education structure. The paper aims to contribute to the reconstruction of inclusive education by foregrounding Vygotsky's psycho-philosophical perspective as a socially situated, dialogical and transformative process.

Inclusive education: beyond physical placement

Historically, schools have categorised students by perceived deficits and have developed separate educational provisions for those considered atypical. These approaches exemplified medical and deficit perspectives on disability, which saw the problem as lying within the individual rather than in the educational context.

Inclusive education, according to Vygotsky, must work towards an approach that values interpretation grounded in scientific thought and rejects the arithmetic approach (standardised, such as the Binet system). According to Vygotsky: "The task of methodology is not merely to learn how to measure, but also to learn how to see, how to think, how to relate; and this means that the excessive fear of so-called subjective moments in interpretation and the attempt to obtain the results of our studies in a purely mechanical and arithmetical manner, as occurs in Binet's system, is erroneous" (Vygotsky, 1931/1997, p. 316).

However, contemporary academic discussion has contested such assumptions by foregrounding social and relational perspectives on disability and inclusion. Inclusive education is often seen as a revolution of educational cultures, policies and practices to ensure participation for all learners. Diversity is seen as an asset that enhances learning communities rather than a problem to be addressed (Selisko et al., 2024).

This transition requires a reconsideration of the conceptualisation of learning and development. If inclusion is seen only as access to mainstream classrooms, then learners' educational experiences will remain the same. For inclusion to be real, we need a theoretical framework that recognises the social dimension of learning and the importance of participation in cultural practices. Inclusive education means a rearrangement of the learning environment so that all learners can participate in learning activities and interact with one another.

Moreover, inclusion is not just about disability and physical placement of learners in the classroom. The concept of inclusive education in the modern world encompasses a range of diversity issues, including language, culture, gender, social and economic status, and migration background. The socio-cultural approach helps educators understand that these factors influence learners' participation in educational activities and the construction of knowledge in classrooms.

Vygotsky's defectology and contemporary inclusive education

One of the most important, yet still insufficiently explored, contributions of Vygotsky is his research in defectology, the study of disability and aberrant development. Unlike the dominant views of his time, however, Vygotsky did not see disability as merely a biological deficit. He differentiated between primary and secondary disabilities.

Primary disabilities are biological disorders, and secondary disabilities are social reactions to impairment. A hearing impairment may be a primary condition, and exclusion from education due to inaccessible communication methods is a secondary disability.

The distinction also foreshadowed modern social conceptions of disability. Vygotsky argued that educational interventions should be directed toward eliminating social barriers, rather than merely focusing on deficits. His work is therefore a first critique of deficit-oriented methodologies and lays important foundations for inclusive education.

The psycho-philosophical foundations of Vygotsky's theory

Vygotsky's scholarship arose from the ideological framework of dialectical materialism. Drawing on Marxist theory, he believed that human development was a dynamic process that depended on the relationships between individuals and their socio-cultural environments. He rejected reductionist interpretations of human development and proposed that psychological processes develop through participation in socially organised activities. Vygotsky says, "There is no biological predetermination of human consciousness, nor is it made by the individual in isolation". It is produced through interaction with people and is aided by cultural instruments.

The fundamental philosophical prerequisite of Vygotsky's thesis is that humans are fundamentally social animals. Learning is not an individual cognitive process but a culturally situated practice taking place in relationships and communities. Development and learning are always embedded in social, historical, and cultural contexts. Therefore, the unity of emotion, cognition, sociality, and development establishes Vygotsky's psycho-philosophical significance. This perspective is highly relevant to contemporary research on teachers' emotions and inclusion. Inclusion is understood and endorsed in relation to the positioning of teachers' experiences, professional relationships, institutional support systems, and pedagogical aspects (Faria, Camargo, 2025).

This perspective has significant implications for inclusive education. Learning results from participation in social practices. Isolation from meaningful connections is a major barrier to learning. On the other hand, inclusive environments that foster collaboration and participation are crucial for cognitive development.

The notion of fixed intelligence and innate ability is being challenged by Vygotsky. He argues that historical context, social engagement, and cultural tools shape human potential, which is inherently fluid. This view is consistent with the promise of inclusive education to recognise the abilities of all learners.

An important philosophical aspect of Vygotsky's theory is its dialectical nature. Vygotsky, while emphasising the qualitative and holistic aspect of development, argued in favour of a dialectical conception of development (Tzouriadou, 2021). Development is a transformative process arising from the interaction between persons and their circumstances. Learning and development should not be viewed as two separate processes. Vygotsky argued that learning can lead to development. It promotes teaching methods that provide many learning opportunities for all students rather than waiting for readiness to emerge.

Social origin of higher mental functions

One of Vygotsky's most important ideas is that cognition has a social origin. Human cognition is developed through participation in culturally organised activities and interaction with more knowledgeable members of society (Vygotsky, 1978). "Higher psychological functions develop out of social interactions before they can be internalised as psychological processes", he says. He argued that every psychological function develops in two stages: first, between people (inter-psychological), and then within the person (intra-psychological). Simply from lower to higher cognitive functioning is not the correct interpretation of Vygotsky's work; rather, these functions incorporate a culturally mediated dialectical transformation (Veresov, 2021).

This perspective supports inclusive education learning by interaction. Students learn through dialogue, collaboration, collective problem solving and participation in communities of practice. Differences among learners are opportunities to learn from each other, not barriers to doing well in school. In recent years, studies examining inclusive educational practices have highlighted the significance of social participa-

tion, peer collaboration, and cooperative learning settings in improving academic and social outcomes (Narot, Kiettikunwong, 2024).

The social basis of higher cognitive abilities also influences classroom structure. If learning is fundamentally social, then the classroom is a community of practice rather than a collection of isolated individuals. Teachers can design activities that encourage collective inquiry, reciprocal help, and cooperative problem-solving. Such arrangements allow learners with different strengths and backgrounds to work together on tasks, providing more opportunities for participation and development.

Opportunities for extensive social contact are especially important for historically disenfranchised learners. Collaborative activities encourage academic learning but also the development of confidence, identity and belonging. The social nature of learning is key to educational success and inclusion.

This finding has some important implications for inclusive classrooms. Diverse learners offer different experiences, perspectives, and skills to learning environments. The differences create opportunities for cooperative problem-solving and mutual help. Research shows that peer-mediated learning can enhance the academic achievement and social participation of diverse learners. Students learn from the faculty and from each other who bring a variety of areas of expertise to the classroom. It is important to note that the interaction of children with special needs with peers without disabilities and adults, which creates a significant space for higher mental functioning, is being emphasised, thereby establishing Vygotsky's relevance for inclusive education (Dmitry, Lubovsky, 2024).

Hence, inclusion should not be considered as the mere placement of heterogeneous learners in the same physical environment. It is, instead, about establishing the conditions for meaningful participation in collaborative learning activities.

Mediation and cultural tools in inclusive education

Mediation is a fundamental principle in Vygotsky's theory. Humans do not interact directly with the world; these interactions are mediated

through cultural tools, symbols, signs, and language. These tools influence cognition, education, and development. Language plays a highly important role as a mediational instrument. Language allows learners to interact with cultural information, negotiate meanings and participate in social activities. Development requires educational methods that emphasise debate and communication. Phala (2023) argues that the use of language, resources, and methodological approaches helps learners face reading challenges.

Mediation requires educators to recognise multiple modes of communication and cultural assets from an inclusive perspective. Students may use many languages, symbolic systems, technologies, and modes of expression. Thus, inclusive classrooms need to offer a range of interaction and representation.

Vygotsky's concept of mediation emphasises the cultural nature of learning. The tools available to learners are shaped by historical and social circumstances, with different groups emphasising different types of knowledge and communication. Inclusive education requires an understanding of diverse cultures and an acknowledgement of learners' existing resources and experiences. Cong-Lem (2022) emphasises the role of cultural tools and activities, and of social mediation, in understanding the concepts of learning and development.

Mediation provides a framework for understanding accessibility in inclusive education. Students have different styles of dealing with information, expressing ideas, and participating in academic activities. Hence, inclusive classrooms necessitate a number of mediational approaches. Some of them are as follows:

- assistive technologies for disabled people;
- visual schedules and graphic organisers;
- sign language and augmentative communication methods;
- e-Learning platforms;
- instructional resources in multiple languages.

Instead of seeing these supports as special accommodations, a Vygotskian perspective recognises them as mediational resources that enhance engagement for all learners.

This understanding is consistent with Universal Design for Learning (UDL), which promotes multiple means of representation, engagement, and expression (CAST, 2018). Both paradigms emphasise flexibility and responsiveness to the variety of learners.

Language and the formation of thought

Vygotsky viewed language as a part of cognitive development. Thought and language develop through complex interrelations and eventually become unified in higher psychological functioning. Knowledge, the modulation of behaviour, and the making of meaning are acquired by learners through discourse with others.

This position has significant implications for inclusive education. The organisation of classrooms should be such as to afford opportunities for substantial communication. Students should be given opportunities to express ideas, negotiate meaning, ask questions, and participate in discussions with others.

Inclusive classrooms demand pedagogies that appreciate multiple perspectives and different ways of expression. Dialogue is a teaching method and a way to build engagement and a sense of community. Educational settings that recognise communication as a social, collaborative enterprise foster success for students who are disenfranchised by linguistic differences, disabilities, or cultural backgrounds.

The connection between cognition and language has a significant role in shaping the discourse of education. Interpretation of various events, problem-solving, and understanding of issues can be addressed through classroom dialogues. In this environment, open classroom dialogues should be encouraged, where learners can freely express themselves and receive constructive feedback. Vygotsky considers language diversity an opportunity rather than an obstacle.

Zone of proximal development and inclusive learning

The zone of proximal development (ZPD) is one of the most important concepts given by Vygotsky. The ZPD represents the distance between what a child can do independently and

what he or she can do with the support of a more knowledgeable other (MKO).

ZPD = Level of development with support — independently attained developmental level

The aforementioned formula represents the gap between independent doing and doing with support that may include collaboration, scaffolding, and mediated support.

The fixed-ability idea is also questioned by the ZPD. Usually, learners are assessed to determine their rank based on their individual capabilities. Vygotsky questioned such an assessment, as it provides only a fragmented view of the learner's development.

The ZPD offers a flexible framework for understanding the learner's potential in inclusive education. With the appropriate collaboration and support, a learner can be facilitated in developing diverse capabilities. The diversity among learners is to be seen as an opportunity rather than a deficiency in the process of learning and development. Tilak et al. (2025) argue that cognitive support from peers and educators can create an individual zone of proximal development.

The ZPD sees educational expectation differently. It does not lower expectations for a learner facing difficulty; rather, it suggests providing appropriate support to help them learn and move forward. This perspective shifts ideas from limitations to possibilities and motivates learners to strengthen and evolve their abilities.

The ZPD is important for inclusive education because it rejects static notions of ability. Traditional assessments typically assess current performance, thereby reinforcing fixed learner categorisations. The ZPD, however, stresses future development.

This transition has some ramifications:

- all learners have the capacity to develop;
- support structures may facilitate development;
- performance fluctuations are not permanent disabilities;
- learning is before advancement.

Inclusive classrooms are guided by the zone of proximal development (ZPD) and emphasise scaffolding, collaborative learning, peer tutoring, and guided participation.

It also challenges the practice of ability grouping and segregation, as development occurs through contact with people with diverse knowledge.

Internalisation and the construction of agency

Internalisation is the process by which socially mediated activities become internalised psychological functions. Learners slowly internalise ways of thinking, reasoning, and problem-solving through participation in cultural practices. This idea is an alternative to the idea of learning as knowledge transfer. Knowledge reconstruction and agency development are nurtured through social activities that involve active participation in learning. Vygotsky's contribution extends beyond conventional educational psychology toward a broader theory of education in which development is understood through socially mediated activity (Nardo, 2021).

Therefore, inclusive education should offer opportunities for active participation rather than passive absorption. Students are responsible for their own growth through participation in collaborative learning situations. Learning environments that promote discovery, inquiry, and shared decision-making enhance cognitive and social development.

Internalisation emphasises the need for substantive engagement. The learners do not acquire knowledge from others; they transform socially shared actions into individual understanding. This change requires opportunities for interaction, reflection and application of ideas in many situations.

Agency is a central issue in inclusive education. As the primary beneficiaries of support, students may have limited opportunities to exercise choice and influence their learning. Vygotsky believed that inclusive classrooms should provide students with opportunities to share their ideas, make decisions, and actively engage in collaborative learning. Hence, inclusive education should provide opportunities for active engagement rather than passive absorption.

Perezhivanie and the emotional dimension of inclusion

A central, though rarely explored, notion in Vygotsky's work is that of *perezhivanie*. This

concept refers to the emotional and cognitive experiences people use to make sense of and respond to their environment. *Perezhivanie* emphasises the interdependence of emotion and intellect. Learning is not just an intellectual activity; it is shaped by social relationships, cultural contexts, and learning environments.

This notion of inclusive education emphasises the significance of belonging, recognition and emotional well-being. Students at risk of exclusion, prejudice, or marginalisation may encounter barriers that impact their emotional and cognitive development. Inclusive classrooms need to develop caring relationships, positive identities and affective pedagogies. Recent research on inclusive practice highlights the importance of emotional support, empathy and constructive criticism in encouraging participation and engagement (Narot, Kiettikunwong, 2024).

The concept of *perezhivanie* also reminds educators that the same educational environment can be experienced differently by different learners. What one student experiences as encouraging and inspiring about a learning activity, another student might find frightening or alienating. Therefore, educators should attend to both instructional design and students' subjective feelings of engagement. Good *perezhivaniya* (experiences) that enhance learning and inclusion can be generated through practices such as relational work, culturally responsive pedagogy, restorative practices and space for student voice and agency.

Inclusion, from a Vygotskian perspective (*perezhivanie*), requires attention to:

- academic setting;
- peer-to-peer interpersonal relationships;
- mental well-being;
- identity formation;
- membership feeling.

Inclusion is not only a matter of teaching, but also an emotional and relational process.

Co-construction of knowledge and collaborative learning

The basic premise of Vygotsky's theory is that knowledge is constructed collaboratively through social interaction. Learning is a co-

operative activity in which people negotiate meanings and build shared understandings. This principle is closely aligned with inclusive educational philosophies. Classroom diversity provides many perspectives, experiences and kinds of knowledge. Contemporary research indicates the significance of collaboration and interdependence in challenging ableist ideas and supporting equitable participation (Healy et al., 2024).

Collaborative learning, as opposed to an emphasis on individual participation and achievement, is guided by the idea of co-construction, which addresses the need for inclusive education. The ability to engage in dialogue with others, negotiate, and develop a common understanding can be fostered in a cooperative environment. Such a process surely provides an opportunity for academic strength, social collaboration, and integration.

The recent importance of this position is evident in the use of Vygotsky's theory to develop inclusive teacher education. De Souza (2024) explores the use of institutional context, cultural tools, and collaborative activities to make teacher education more inclusive through a collaborative change project in Eswatini and Malawi.

Developing authentic collaboration, rather than just dividing tasks, is the implication of co-construction to inclusive education. Shared sense-making can be facilitated by inquiry-driven projects, problem-based learning, collaborative discussion, and peer instruction.

Implications for inclusive pedagogy

A Vygotskian perspective provides strengthened ideas for pedagogical transformation that value an interactive learning environment for inclusive education. It proposes several pedagogical ideas. Some of them are given below.

- Dialogue-centered pedagogy: Education should be based on meaningful discourse that supports engagement, inquiry, and reflection.
- Scaffolding: The teacher gives temporary support that helps the learner to do things beyond their actual ability.
- Cooperative learning: Developmental resource and peer interaction.

- Culturally responsive teaching: Instruction should leverage learners' cultural experiences, languages, and identities.

- Flexible engagement: Diverse learning requirements should be addressed by multiple engagement channels.

These ideas reject inclusion as a replacement strategy rather than as an educational process. The core of inclusive pedagogy is to anticipate the diversity of students' perspectives rather than working on a solution when a challenge arises. Diverse initiation, varied study materials, and opportunities for collaboration are essential elements in developing a lesson. Such readiness creates opportunities to broaden learning opportunities for all learners.

Implications for assessment

Dynamic assessment approaches that assess student performance with assistance and support are supported by Vygotsky's theory. The concept of dynamic assessment is closely linked to the zone of proximal development (ZPD), as it emphasises the development of competencies rather than static abilities.

Therefore, inclusive assessment should:

- focus on development and capability;
- incorporate collaborative assignments;
- use multiple sources of evidence;
- determine factors in the context that affect performance;
- provide positive feedback.

Assessment acts as a facilitator of learning rather than a classifier of learners. Building on this perspective, inclusive assessment recognises that learners demonstrate understanding through a variety of modalities. Portfolios, observations, presentations, projects, self-assessments and peer assessments can complement traditional examinations and provide a more complete picture of learning.

Formative assessment is of great importance in the Vygotskian paradigm. Through ongoing feedback and discussion, teachers can find out what the students already know, support and allow them to move through their zones of proximal development. Assessment is therefore integrated with instruction and not separated from it.

Implications for teacher preparation

Educators are a key component in Vygotsky's theory as facilitators of learning. Inclusive education calls for teacher development programs that combine theoretical knowledge with practical skills.

Preference should be given to teacher education in:

- sociocultural learning theories;
- recognising diversity as a pedagogical resource;
- cooperative learning strategies;
- progressive assessment methods;
- inclusive, thoughtful classroom management;
- culturally relevant teaching.

According to research, the successful implementation of inclusive policies depends on teacher agency, institutional support, and opportunities for professional reflection (Hendriksen et al., 2024). Teacher preparation should provide prospective teachers with opportunities to work with diverse learners in authentic educational settings. It is not just coursework. Inclusive competences can be developed with reflective practices, authentic practical engagements, and collaborative research.

Needless to say, a strong support system needs to be created to help educators overcome the prevailing barriers to inclusion. These barriers can take different forms, such as limited resources, large class sizes, inflexible curricula, and standardised-outcomes-based accountability. To address these pedagogical innovations, a comprehensive educational framework should be the core of professional development practices.

Conclusion

Inclusive education is more than the promise of policy and practical access to mainstream classrooms. It demands a theoretical understanding of learning, development and diversity that may inform educational practice. Vygotsky's socio-cultural theory is a seminal framework. Vygotsky presents a psycho-philosophical theory where cognition is socially derived, culturally mediated, learned through cooperation, and transformed through language, and challenges deficit-based education systems.

From a Vygotskian perspective, inclusive education is not just integration, but a vision of equal participation, belonging, and collective human growth. It provides a sound basis for meeting today's educational challenges and achieving the goal of universal education.

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Information about the authors

Sandeep Kumar, Leading Researcher in the fields of Human Development, Learning and Cognition, and Inclusive Education, Professor of Education, Department of Education, University of Delhi, Delhi, India, ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4152-4156>, e-mail: sandeepkumarcie@gmail.com

Информация об авторах

Сандип Кумар, ведущий научный сотрудник в области развития человека, обучения и познания, а также инклюзивного образования; профессор педагогики, кафедра педагогики, Делийский университет, Дели, Индия, ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4152-4156>, e-mail: sandeepkumarcie@gmail.com

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