

Inclusive Education: Policies and Pathways for Effective Implementation

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ABSTRACT

Education is widely recognized as a fundamental pillar for individual, societal, and national development. Consequently, it is imperative that every nation ensures the provision of quality education to all citizens, without discrimination. In developing countries such as India, education is accorded the highest priority for fostering growth. The absence of universal access to education within a country may significantly impede its developmental progress. The Government of India has implemented various policies on inclusive education, emphasizing the right of children from diverse backgrounds and abilities to access formal education. However, despite these efforts, disparities have persisted. The principle of "Education for All" remains a central tenet of the Indian educational system. The National Education Policies of 1968 and 1986, along with the Right to Education Act of 2009, initiated efforts to improve access and enrollment of children in Indian schools. The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, introduced in the 21st century, was a long-anticipated development. This policy addresses the needs of Socially and Economically Disadvantaged Groups (SEDGs), encompassing various socio-cultural identities, gender identities, geographical identities, and disabilities. Numerous studies have demonstrated that the literacy status of SEDGs remains unsatisfactory. This paper aims to examine the provisions made in various Indian Educational Policies,

with particular emphasis on the National Education Policy 2020, regarding persons with disabilities. Furthermore, it will discuss the potential implications of these provisions.

INTRODUCTION

After Independence Education System of India faced several changes while implementing new policies and making education accessible to all. Numerous policies, commissions worked out pretty well for providing quality education to all. As we know that Education is a fundamental right of every Indian citizen. Education is the right of every child from each and every group. Inclusive education gives a way to children belongs to diverse group to get formal education. United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), gave a definition of Inclusive Education for Special Needs Education as, “Inclusive education is concerned with removing all barriers to learning, and with the participation of all learners vulnerable to exclusion and marginalisation. It is a strategic approach designed to facilitate learning success for all children.

Approx there are 240 million children with disabilities worldwide as per data of UNESCO. Like other children, children with disabilities also have dreams and ambitions for their futures. They also required quality education to develop their skills and realize their full potential. Policymakers often overlooked Children with disabilities their access to education and how they can participate in social, economic and political life. Children with disabilities are most likely to be out of school as they face so many barriers to education. For this Inclusive education provide opportunity to all children to be in same class. In the past several attempts made to make inclusive education possible but this area still remain insufficiently rolling due to multiple reasons. Now New Education Policy 2020 came up with such a policy which includes the minute details. If the New Education Policy 2020 implement with proper planning, then it will be helpful to proved as a motivation for inclusive education. This will bring the standard shift in inclusive education.

Inclusive education in India

Inclusive Education is not a different term in India. In India as a separate system of education special education for disabled children outside the mainstream education system came in view in 1880s when first school opened in Bombay in 1883 for deaf children and for blind children at Amritsar in 1887. After this policies made in India related to education also gave importance to Inclusive education. But in June 1994 it got recognition formally by UNESCO organized World Conference on Special Education

Access and Equality. After and before this many policies formed time to time to break educational boundaries.

- **National Policy of Education 1968:** National Education Policy made in 1968 gave special importance on inclusive education & education for all. Policy under the heading of “Equalization of Educational Opportunity” recommended developing level of education in remote areas and among backward social classes and with this it also mentioned about educational facilities and amenities for the physically and mentally challenged.
- **Integrated Education for disabled children (IEDC-1974):** The Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, in 1974 with Government of India launched the IEDC program to promote the integration of students into regular schools with mild to moderate disabilities. Along with this financial support for books, stationery, school uniforms, transport, special equipment and aides also provided to students.
- **National Policy of Education 1986:** National Educational Policy 1986 made a detailed discussion and recommendations for encouraging integrated education for disabled in India. This policy made the blue print to cover almost all the levels of education.
- **Project Integrated Education for the Disabled (PIED, 1987):** The Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD) in 1987 inaugurated the “Project Education for the Disabled” (PIED) with United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) and the National Council for Educational Research and Training (NCERT).
- **Programme of Action (PoA), 1992:** Programme of Action 1992 plays a role of milestone in education system of India. It emphasize on education of disabled with the aim of equal access to quality education to the children with different disabilities. Programme of Action 1992, suggested that there is no need to send children in special school, if they can be educated in normal school.
- **District Primary Education Program (DPEP, 1994):** A centrally sponsored scheme, the District Primary Education Program (DPEP) aims-
 - to reduce the overall dropout rates of all students enrolled in primary classes,
 - to raise their achievement levels,
 - to provide primary education for all children, including children with disabilities.
- **The Persons with Disabilities (PwD) Act, 1995:** A new drawn is made by The Persons with Disabilities Act, 1995 in Inclusive education. Several committees were formed to ensure equality

to the disabled. It set up special schools in different parts of the nation. It included the provision for higher education and vocational education also.

- **National Policy for Persons with Disabilities, 2006:** Ministry of social justice framed a National Policy for persons with disabilities in 2006. This policy highlighted that “education is the most effective vehicle of social and economic empowerment” (NPPD, P.4, 2006). This policy emphasized on the integrated education as referred in Sarva Shiksha Abhiyaan (SSA) for the education of the disabled children. It also gave emphasize on training of teachers for making a friendly environment.
- **Right to Education (RTE) Act- 2009:** Right to Education Act- 2009, was another milestone in Indian education, as it gave the free and compulsory education right to child within the age group of 6 to 14 years without any bias. It ensures to provide equal opportunities to all specially who are suffering from any kind of disability or belongs to underprivileged group.
- **Inclusive Education for Disabled at Secondary Stage 2009-2010:** Inclusive Education for Disabled scheme at Secondary Stage was launched at 2009- 2010. It aims to attend secondary education by all students with disabilities after completion of elementary education. For fulfillment of aim, it provided students with aids, applications, devices, infrastructure and learning environment. For ensuring this training of school teachers also planned.
- **The Rights of Persons with Physical Disabilities Act, 2016:** In 2016 Right to Persons with Physical Disabilities Act came in action. It aims to provide protection and equal opportunities to person with disabilities and barrier free social environment in all sectors including education. It also recommended inclusive education for all the educational institution in the nation. It also talks about the Special provision for the students with benchmark disability by providing reservation, scholarship.
- **National Education Policy (NEP) 2020:** National Educational Policy-2020 identified education as most important upliftment tool in India. A provision has been made to promote equality in education in respect of gender, economic & social status, disability or on any other ground. Special education zones (SEZs) formed for promoting inclusive education.

Inclusive Education- International perspective

According to international report there are an approx 240 million children with disability worldwide. These children are most likely to be out of school. They all are equally important to they have also a right to get education. International organizations related to education also put emphasize on this issue:



- **United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)** believes that every learner is equally important. After that also millions of people worldwide continue to be excluded from education by giving several reasons like sex, gender orientation, ethnic or social origin, language, religion, nationality, economic condition or ability. Here importance of Inclusive education works as it helps to identify all barriers to education and remove them and covers everything. UNESCO's work in this area is firstly guided by the UNESCO Convention against discrimination in Education (1960) along with sustainable development goal 4 and Framework for Action Education 2030, according to which inclusion and equity is the foundation for quality education.

- **United Nations Children's fund (UNICEF)** believes to close the education gap for children with disabilities, for this UNICEF supports government efforts to foster and monitor inclusive education systems. It focuses on four key areas:
 - **Advocacy:** UNICEF promotes inclusive education in discussions, high-level events and other forms of outreach geared towards policymakers and the general public.
 - **Awareness-raising:** UNICEF shines a spotlight on the needs of children with disabilities by conducting research and hosting roundtables, workshops and other events for government partners.
 - **Capacity-building:** UNICEF builds the capacity of education systems in partner countries by training teachers, administrators and communities and providing technical assistance to Governments.
 - **Implementation support:** UNICEF assists with monitoring and evaluation in partner countries to close the implementation gap between policy and practice.

The right to equal and quality education, initially set out in Article 28 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNICEF, 1989) and Article 24 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, is also reinforced in the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda, adopted in September 2015. Goal 4 of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals aims to ensure equal access to all levels of education for people with disabilities. This extends from the provision of early childhood education through to technical, vocational, and tertiary education for all.

SUGGESTIONS TO IMPLEMENT INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

For Policy Makers:

- Develop demonstration projects and encourage the exchange of projects with countries having experience with inclusive schools
- Decentralized the planning, monitoring and evaluating educational provision for special children
- Encourage participation of parents, communities and organization of persons with disabilities in planning and decision making process
- Develop strategies to early identification and interventions accordingly
- Education system should be designed according to diverse needs
- There should be access of regular classes to all and enrolling all children in regular classes
- Should frame budgetary policies to improve educational system especially individual differences and difficulties
- With eligibility criteria Proper guidelines should be framed to ensure full coverage of mentioned categories of SEDGs
- Regular Check on the availability of inclusive and special schools and assess of all required facilities and infrastructure of such schools.
- Check on the availability of special educators and resource centers in rural areas & construct where required.

For Teacher Educators:

- Ensure teacher education programmes- Pre service and in service to enhance awareness among teachers towards inclusive education
- Associate Vocational training with Inclusive education to teachers
- Orientation and training on awareness and knowledge about the rights of Education & provisions available for disabled children should be made for parents/caregivers and teachers.

For School Administration:

- School should accommodate all children with same focus (physical, emotional, social, intellectual, linguistic etc.)
- Teacher-student ratio should be checked and monitored in schools providing inclusive education.

- Inclusive and Special schools to be equipped with latest technology and there should be provision for regular training of special educators to be techno friendly in SEZs areas.
- Parents who are illiterate or partially literate should be provided by an alternate solution for providing home-based education.

DISCUSSION IN TERM OF NEP 2020

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 envisages an inclusive and structural change in the educational system. It focuses on 'Equitable and Inclusive Education' which reverberates the idea that no child should be left behind in terms of educational opportunity because of their background and socio-cultural identities. It has taken into account the concerns of the Socio-Economically Disadvantaged Groups (SEDGs) which includes female and transgender individuals, Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, OBCs, minorities and other categories. This policy aims at bridging the social category gaps in access, participation, and learning outcomes in school education. Some discussion points are:

- NEP2020 categorized social groups at broader level called Socio- Economically Disadvantaged groups (SEDGs). This might remove the segregation of child need special attention in society and education system and reduce the scope for them.
- According to NEP 2020 included the provision of selecting school of differently abled children, neighborhood school, home based education and special school. But in reality there are very few schools which provide inclusive education to attainment of this goal.
- Home based education can be prove good initiative as it involves the active participation of parents & caretaker. Research findings proved that more than 90% of parents of children with disability shows possessive and protective attitude towards their children. But no proper guideline for home-based education has been provided- curriculum, technique and method of assessment etc.
- In India there is a scarcity of resource centers and special educators. For success of home based education its required technology based orientation of parents and caretakers. Lack of this might be a great problem for success.
- There is an imbalance in teacher people ratio which can be a great obstruction towards the goal of one on one teacher and technology interventions.

- NEP recommended, identifying SEZs is a good way to get equity and inclusion in the situation of regional disparities and differences.
- With the help of research findings NEP recommended innovative teaching methods and technology based solution for assuring the quality of Inclusive education.

CONCLUSION

The current paradigm necessitates a shift in societal perception regarding individuals with disabilities, emphasizing the recognition of their unique capabilities. Mere identification of children with disabilities is no longer sufficient; it is our ethical obligation to ensure the provision of quality education for all. By focusing on these children, we can facilitate the manifestation of their exceptional abilities. In India, the implementation of inclusive education has encountered numerous obstacles. However, the introduction of the New Education Policy (NEP) 2020 has provided a comprehensive framework to address these challenges. The successful implementation of this policy, with proper planning, has the potential to serve as a significant milestone in the realm of inclusive education. It is important to note that the success of NEP 2020 is also contingent upon the active participation of Indian citizens. This paper examines the correlation and significance of NEP 2020 in relation to previous policies pertaining to inclusive education. Additionally, it offers recommendations for the implementation of inclusive education in classrooms, considering both Indian and international perspectives. The primary objective of NEP is to cultivate an environment that provides equal opportunities for holistic development to all students. Inclusive education has the potential to be a pivotal factor in achieving this goal. Therefore, it is imperative in the current scenario and to reinforce the objectives of NEP, that we actively engage in the implementation of inclusive education. The implementation of inclusive education requires a multifaceted approach that addresses various aspects of the educational system. This includes the development of accessible infrastructure, the provision of specialized teaching materials and the training of educators to effectively cater to diverse learning needs. Furthermore, it is crucial to foster a culture of acceptance and understanding among students, parents and the wider community. NEP 2020's emphasis on inclusive education aligns with global trends and international commitments, such as the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. By adopting best practices from successful inclusive education models worldwide, India can tailor these approaches to suit its unique socio-cultural context. This may involve leveraging technology to enhance accessibility, promoting collaborative learning environments and implementing flexible assessment methods that accommodate different learning styles and abilities. To ensure the effective implementation of inclusive education under NEP 2020, it is essential to

establish robust monitoring and evaluation mechanisms. These systems should track progress, identify challenges, and facilitate continuous improvement in inclusive practices. Additionally, fostering partnerships between educational institutions, NGOs, and the private sector can provide valuable resources and expertise to support this initiative. The success of inclusive education also hinges on addressing societal attitudes and misconceptions about disabilities. Public awareness campaigns and community engagement programs can play a crucial role in promoting inclusivity and challenging stereotypes. By highlighting the achievements and contributions of individuals with disabilities, we can shift the narrative from one of limitation to one of potential and empowerment.

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