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Teacher Preparedness for Inclusive Classrooms: Challenges and Opportunities in the Context of NEP 2020

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ABSTRACT

Inclusive education has emerged as an important approach towards ensuring equitable, accessible and quality education for all learners, irrespective of their abilities, backgrounds, identities and learning requirements. The successful implementation of inclusive education largely depends on the preparedness of teachers, as they play a central role in creating supportive learning environments and responding to the diverse needs of students. The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 emphasises equitable and inclusive education and recognises the importance of preparing teachers to address learner diversity through appropriate pedagogical practices, professional competencies and continuous professional development. However, several challenges, including inadequate professional training, limited practical exposure, negative attitudes, insufficient teaching resources and institutional constraints, may affect teachers' ability to implement inclusive practices effectively. This paper critically examines the concept and dimensions of teacher preparedness for inclusive classrooms, the provisions of NEP 2020, major challenges, emerging opportunities and strategies for

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strengthening inclusive teaching competencies. It argues that effective inclusion requires more than policy commitment; it demands systematic teacher preparation, institutional support, collaborative practices and continuous professional learning.

Introduction

Education is widely recognised as a fundamental means of individual development, social transformation and national progress. It provides opportunities for acquiring knowledge, developing skills, building values and participating meaningfully in society. However, the educational experiences of learners are not always equal. Differences in socio-economic conditions, gender, disability, language, culture, geographical location, family background and individual learning abilities may influence the opportunities available to children within the education system. These differences make it necessary for educational institutions to develop approaches that recognise learner diversity and ensure meaningful participation for every student. In this context, inclusive education has gained considerable importance as an approach that seeks to reduce educational barriers and create learning environments in which all children are valued and supported.

Inclusive education is not limited to the admission of children with disabilities into regular schools. It represents a broader educational commitment to recognising diversity, addressing discrimination and ensuring that every learner receives appropriate opportunities for participation and achievement. UNESCO (2017) emphasises that inclusion and equity should be considered fundamental principles of education systems rather than separate interventions for particular groups. Similarly, the Global Education Monitoring Report highlights that educational inclusion requires addressing the different barriers that prevent learners from accessing, participating in and benefiting from education (UNESCO, 2020). Thus, inclusive education involves changes in educational policies, institutional arrangements, curriculum, pedagogy, assessment and school culture. Teachers occupy a central position in the implementation of inclusive education because they directly influence classroom interactions, teaching strategies, assessment practices and students' learning experiences. A teacher may encounter learners with different levels of academic achievement, language abilities, cultural backgrounds, physical conditions, emotional needs and learning preferences within the same classroom. Responding effectively to this diversity requires more than subject knowledge or conventional teaching skills. Teachers need professional knowledge, positive attitudes, pedagogical flexibility, assessment competencies and the ability to collaborate with parents, special educators and other professionals. Florian and Black-Hawkins (2011) explain inclusive pedagogy as an approach that extends learning opportunities to everybody rather than creating separate arrangements for selected learners. This

understanding places responsibility on teachers to examine their classroom practices and identify ways of making learning accessible to all students. Similarly, Ainscow (2005) argues that the development of inclusive education requires changes in institutional thinking, educational practices and the wider conditions that influence learning.

In India, the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 provides an important framework for strengthening equitable and inclusive education. The policy recognises the educational needs of Socio-Economically Disadvantaged Groups (SEDGs) and emphasises equitable access, quality education, inclusive learning environments and appropriate support for disadvantaged learners. It also highlights the importance of teacher preparation, professional development and the use of appropriate pedagogical approaches to address diverse learning needs (Ministry of Education, 2020). The Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016 further strengthens the legal commitment towards inclusive education by recognising the educational rights of persons with disabilities and providing for measures relating to accessibility, reasonable accommodation and appropriate support. These policy and legislative provisions indicate that inclusive education requires coordinated efforts from teachers, educational institutions, teacher education institutions and the government. Therefore, teacher preparedness becomes a significant factor in determining the effectiveness of inclusive education. The present paper examines teacher preparedness in the context of inclusive classrooms, analyses the challenges and opportunities associated with its development, and discusses strategies for strengthening teachers' professional competencies in accordance with the vision of NEP 2020.

Conceptual Understanding of Inclusive Education

Inclusive education is an educational approach based on the principles of equality, participation, accessibility, diversity and social justice. It seeks to ensure that all learners, regardless of their individual characteristics or circumstances, receive meaningful opportunities to participate in the teaching-learning process. It recognises that differences among learners are natural and should not become reasons for discrimination, exclusion or unequal educational treatment. According to UNESCO (2017), inclusion and equity involve identifying and removing barriers to education and creating conditions in which every learner can participate and achieve. This understanding extends beyond physical access to schools and includes the quality of educational experiences, classroom relationships, curriculum accessibility and learning outcomes. Inclusive education also requires a shift in the understanding of learner differences. Traditionally, educational difficulties were often viewed primarily in terms of individual limitations. The inclusive perspective, however, encourages teachers and institutions to examine how teaching methods, assessment

procedures, school environments and institutional practices may create barriers to learning. This shift places greater responsibility on educational systems to become responsive to the diverse needs of learners.

Principles of Inclusive Education

The major principles of inclusive education include:

1. **Equality and Equity:** Every learner should receive fair educational opportunities, with additional support provided according to individual needs.
2. **Respect for Diversity:** Differences in ability, language, culture, gender, socio-economic background and learning styles should be recognised and respected.
3. **Accessibility:** Educational institutions, learning materials, teaching methods and assessment procedures should be accessible to diverse learners.
4. **Participation:** All learners should be encouraged to participate actively in academic, social and co-curricular activities.
5. **Non-Discrimination:** No learner should experience exclusion or unequal treatment because of disability, gender, social identity or other personal circumstances.
6. **Collaborative Support:** Teachers, parents, special educators, school administrators and communities should work together to strengthen inclusive learning environments.
7. **Individualised Learning Support:** Educational practices should respond to differences in learning pace, abilities, interests and support requirements.

Difference between Integration and Inclusion

Integration and inclusion are related concepts, but they are not identical. Integration generally involves placing learners with additional educational needs within existing educational settings, whereas inclusion requires the educational institution itself to adapt its practices and environment to accommodate learner diversity.

Basis	Integration	Inclusion
Main emphasis	Placement of learners in regular	Participation and learning of

	settings	all learners
Educational environment	Existing environment is largely maintained	Environment is adapted to diverse needs
Teacher's role	Provides support to selected learners	Plans learning opportunities for everyone
Teaching approach	Often involves separate or additional arrangements	Encourages flexible and inclusive pedagogy
Institutional responsibility	Primarily focuses on learner adjustment	Focuses on removing institutional barriers
Expected outcome	Access to regular schooling	Meaningful participation and achievement

The distinction indicates that inclusive education requires a broader transformation of educational practices rather than merely providing physical access to regular classrooms.

Teacher Preparedness for Inclusive Classrooms

Teacher preparedness refers to the knowledge, attitudes, professional competencies, pedagogical skills and practical abilities required by teachers to respond effectively to the diverse educational needs of learners. It involves the capacity to recognise individual differences, identify learning barriers, select appropriate instructional approaches and establish supportive classroom environments. The European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education (2012) identifies four important values for inclusive teachers: valuing learner diversity, supporting all learners, working with others and engaging in continuous professional development. These values demonstrate that inclusive teaching requires an integrated combination of professional knowledge, attitudes and practical skills.

Teacher preparedness should not be understood only in terms of attending training programmes or acquiring theoretical information. It should also be reflected in the teacher's ability to translate professional knowledge into meaningful classroom practices. A teacher may understand the principles of inclusion but may experience difficulties in implementing them without appropriate pedagogical skills, institutional support and practical exposure.

Major Dimensions of Teacher Preparedness

- **Knowledge and Understanding of Inclusive Education**

Teachers should understand the meaning, principles and objectives of inclusive education. They need awareness of different learning needs, disabilities, developmental variations and socio-cultural differences among students. Such knowledge enables teachers to identify potential barriers and make informed educational decisions.

- **Positive Attitudes and Beliefs**

Teachers' attitudes towards diversity and inclusion influence their classroom behaviour and expectations. Positive attitudes encourage respect, acceptance and equal participation, whereas stereotypes and negative beliefs may contribute to discrimination and exclusion. Avramidis and Norwich (2002) highlighted the importance of teacher attitudes and the influence of classroom and institutional conditions on acceptance of inclusion.

- **Pedagogical Competencies**

Inclusive teachers require the ability to use different teaching methods according to learners' needs. These competencies include differentiated instruction, cooperative learning, activity-based teaching, flexible grouping, experiential learning and learner-centred approaches.

- **Classroom Management Skills**

Teachers should be capable of maintaining a supportive and respectful classroom environment. Effective classroom management involves encouraging positive relationships, addressing behavioural difficulties, preventing discrimination and ensuring meaningful participation in classroom activities.

- **Assessment and Evaluation Competencies**

Inclusive assessment requires flexibility in the methods used to evaluate learning. Teachers should understand formative assessment, continuous feedback, alternative assessment methods and appropriate accommodations for learners who require additional support.

- **Communication and Collaborative Skills**

Teachers need effective communication skills to interact with students, parents, special educators, counsellors and school administrators. Collaboration helps teachers understand learners' needs and develop appropriate support strategies.

- **ICT and Assistive Technology Competencies**

Digital resources and assistive technologies can improve accessibility and provide alternative ways of learning and communication. Teachers should be able to select and use appropriate digital materials, accessible learning platforms and assistive tools.

- **Social and Emotional Sensitivity**

Inclusive teachers should recognise the emotional and social experiences of learners. Empathy, patience, respect, sensitivity and the ability to build positive relationships are essential for creating a supportive classroom environment.

Major Dimensions of Teacher Preparedness for Inclusive Classrooms

Dimension	Essential Competencies	Expected Classroom Contribution
Professional Knowledge	Understanding diversity and inclusion	Recognition of individual learning needs
Attitudes and Beliefs	Empathy, acceptance and respect	Positive classroom relationships
Pedagogical Skills	Differentiated and flexible teaching	Accessible learning opportunities
Classroom Management	Supportive and non-discriminatory practices	Safe learning environment
Assessment Skills	Flexible and formative assessment	Fair evaluation of learning
Collaboration	Communication and teamwork	Coordinated learner support
ICT Competence	Digital and assistive technology	Improved accessibility
Social-Emotional	Sensitivity and emotional support	Learner confidence and

Competence		participation

These dimensions are interconnected. Effective inclusive teaching requires teachers to combine professional understanding with appropriate attitudes and practical classroom competencies.

NEP 2020 Framework for Inclusive Education and Teacher Preparation

The National Education Policy 2020 represents an important policy initiative for transforming the Indian education system. It places considerable emphasis on equity, inclusion, quality and accessibility and recognises that educational opportunities should not be restricted by social, economic, cultural or geographical circumstances. The policy identifies Socio-Economically Disadvantaged Groups (SEDGs) as an important concern and recommends appropriate measures to address their educational needs. These groups include learners affected by gender-related barriers, socio-cultural inequalities, geographical disadvantages, disabilities and economic difficulties. NEP 2020 recognises that inclusive education requires attention to both educational access and the quality of learning experiences. It emphasises the importance of appropriate curriculum, flexible pedagogy, accessible educational environments and teacher preparedness.

- **Equity and Inclusion in School Education**

NEP 2020 aims to reduce disparities in educational opportunities and strengthen the participation of disadvantaged learners. It emphasises the importance of ensuring that students from different social and economic backgrounds receive appropriate educational support. The policy also recognises the significance of gender inclusion, appropriate support for children with disabilities and the removal of barriers that restrict educational participation. These provisions require teachers to develop sensitivity towards diverse learner backgrounds and adopt inclusive classroom practices.

- **Teacher Education and Professional Development**

Teacher education is an essential component of the policy's implementation framework. NEP 2020 emphasises improving teacher preparation through appropriate professional standards, multidisciplinary education and continuous professional development. Section 5 of NEP 2020 highlights continuous opportunities for teachers to improve their professional knowledge and skills. It expects teachers to participate in at least 50 hours of Continuous Professional Development (CPD) opportunities annually. The policy also emphasises innovative pedagogical approaches, formative and adaptive assessment and competency-based learning (Ministry of Education, 2020). These provisions provide opportunities to

incorporate inclusive pedagogy, disability awareness, differentiated instruction and accessible assessment into teacher development programmes.

- **Major Policy Provisions and Their Implications for Teacher Preparedness**

NEP 2020 Focus Area	Relevance to Teacher Preparation
Equity and Inclusion	Developing sensitivity towards learner diversity
SEDGs	Understanding the needs of disadvantaged learners
Teacher Education Reforms	Strengthening professional competencies
Continuous Professional Development	Updating knowledge and pedagogical practices
Multidisciplinary Education	Developing broader professional understanding
Competency-Based Learning	Promoting learner-centred instructional approaches
Technology Integration	Improving accessibility through digital resources
Assessment Reforms	Adopting flexible and formative assessment practices

The policy provides an important direction for strengthening inclusive teacher preparation. However, the achievement of its objectives depends upon the effective implementation of these provisions through teacher education institutions, schools and educational administrations.

Challenges in Preparing Teachers for Inclusive Classrooms

Although inclusive education has received considerable attention in educational policies and professional discussions, preparing teachers for diverse classrooms remains a complex task. Teachers are expected to address different learning needs while working within institutional environments that may have limited resources, insufficient support and varying levels of professional preparedness. The following challenges are particularly significant.

- **Inadequate Professional Training**

One of the major challenges is the insufficient preparation of teachers for working in inclusive classrooms. Conventional teacher education programmes may provide theoretical information about inclusive education

without offering adequate opportunities for practical application. Consequently, teachers may experience difficulties in identifying learning barriers and selecting appropriate instructional strategies. Sharma et al. (2008) examined the influence of training on pre-service teachers' attitudes and concerns regarding inclusive education. Their study, involving 603 pre-service teachers across four countries, demonstrated the importance of teacher preparation in shaping perceptions of inclusion.

- **Limited Practical Exposure**

Understanding inclusive education theoretically does not automatically develop the ability to implement inclusive teaching practices. Teachers require practical experience through school internships, classroom observations, teaching demonstrations and interaction with learners having diverse educational needs. Limited exposure may reduce their confidence in responding to actual classroom situations.

- **Negative Attitudes and Stereotypes**

Some teachers may hold assumptions about the abilities, learning capacities or behaviour of students with disabilities and other disadvantaged learners. Such attitudes may influence classroom expectations, participation and opportunities provided to students. Developing positive attitudes requires professional awareness, meaningful interaction and reflective learning experiences.

- **Large Class Size and Workload**

Managing a classroom containing learners with different abilities and learning requirements requires careful planning and individual attention. Large class sizes, administrative responsibilities and limited instructional time may restrict teachers' ability to provide appropriate support to every learner.

- **Shortage of Teaching-Learning Resources**

Inclusive teaching requires appropriate textbooks, accessible learning materials, assistive devices, digital resources and suitable classroom facilities. Inadequate availability of these resources may limit the practical implementation of inclusive strategies, particularly in schools with limited infrastructure.

- **Limited Knowledge of Special Educational Needs**

Teachers may have insufficient knowledge about different disabilities, developmental conditions, learning difficulties and appropriate educational accommodations. Without such knowledge, it may become difficult to recognise the individual requirements of learners and provide suitable educational support.

- **Inadequate Institutional Support**

Inclusive education cannot be implemented effectively through individual teacher efforts alone. The absence of special educators, counsellors, resource teachers, appropriate infrastructure and administrative support may increase the difficulties experienced by classroom teachers.

- **Assessment-Related Difficulties**

Traditional examination-oriented assessment practices may not adequately recognise the diverse learning abilities and progress of students. Teachers may face difficulties in providing flexible assessment arrangements while maintaining appropriate academic expectations and learning standards.

- **Limited Use of Assistive Technology**

Although technology can improve accessibility, teachers may lack the necessary training to select and use assistive devices and accessible digital resources. Limited technological infrastructure and inadequate technical support may further restrict their use.

- **Gap between Policy and Classroom Practices**

Educational policies may establish important objectives for inclusion, but their translation into classroom practices requires appropriate training, resources and institutional mechanisms. The difference between policy expectations and actual school conditions remains an important challenge for inclusive education.

Opportunities for Strengthening Teacher Preparedness

Despite these challenges, contemporary educational developments and policy initiatives provide several opportunities for improving teacher preparedness. NEP 2020 offers a framework for strengthening teacher education, professional learning and inclusive classroom practices.

- **Strengthening Pre-Service Teacher Education**

Teacher education programmes provide an important opportunity to develop inclusive professional competencies from the beginning of teachers' careers. Inclusive education should receive appropriate attention within teacher preparation curricula, including theoretical understanding, practical experiences and reflective activities.

- **Continuous Professional Development**

NEP 2020 emphasises regular professional development opportunities for teachers. The provision of at least 50 hours of annual CPD can support the development of inclusive teaching competencies when training programmes systematically include disability awareness, differentiated instruction, inclusive assessment and classroom management.

- **Integration of Digital and Assistive Technology**

Digital learning resources provide opportunities to present educational content through different formats, including text, audio, video and interactive materials. Assistive technologies can further support learners who require alternative methods of communication, reading, writing or accessing information.

- **Development of Collaborative Professional Practices**

Collaboration among general teachers, special educators, counsellors and parents can improve the identification of learning needs and the planning of appropriate support. Professional learning communities can also provide opportunities for sharing experiences and developing effective teaching strategies.

- **Promotion of Inclusive Pedagogy**

Inclusive pedagogy encourages teachers to design learning experiences that accommodate diversity from the beginning. Rather than relying exclusively on separate arrangements for selected students, teachers can adopt flexible teaching approaches that benefit the entire classroom.

- **Improved Institutional Support**

School leadership and institutional planning can create opportunities for strengthening inclusive practices. Appropriate infrastructure, accessible learning materials, professional guidance and supportive administrative policies can improve teachers' capacity to address learner diversity.

- **Increased Awareness and Community Participation**

Awareness programmes involving teachers, parents, students and community members can promote positive attitudes towards diversity and reduce discriminatory practices. Community participation can also strengthen the relationship between schools and families.

Challenges and Corresponding Opportunities

Major Challenges	Potential Opportunities

Inadequate teacher training	Inclusive pre-service and in-service training
Limited practical exposure	School internships and classroom-based learning
Negative attitudes	Sensitisation and reflective professional development
Large class size	Cooperative learning and flexible grouping
Shortage of resources	Accessible digital and low-cost teaching materials
Limited specialised knowledge	Collaboration with special educators
Assessment difficulties	Formative and flexible assessment practices
Inadequate institutional support	Stronger school leadership and resource allocation
Limited technological competence	Digital literacy and assistive technology training
Policy-practice gap	Monitoring, mentoring and institutional accountability

These opportunities suggest that teacher preparedness can be strengthened through coordinated professional, institutional and policy-level efforts.

Strategies for Developing Inclusive Teacher Competencies

Strengthening teacher preparedness requires systematic and continuous efforts. Teacher education institutions, schools, educational administrators and policymakers need to work together to ensure that teachers acquire the competencies required for inclusive classroom practices.

The following strategies may contribute to this process.

- **Integrating Inclusive Education into Teacher Education Curricula**

Inclusive education should be meaningfully incorporated into pre-service teacher education programmes. The curriculum should cover learner diversity, disability awareness, inclusive pedagogy, classroom accessibility, educational rights and appropriate assessment practices. Theoretical discussions should be connected with practical teaching experiences.

- **Promoting Universal Design for Learning**

Universal Design for Learning (UDL) provides a framework for designing flexible learning experiences that respond to learner diversity. CAST (2024) emphasises multiple means of engagement, representation, and action and expression. Teachers can use these principles to provide different ways of accessing content, participating in learning activities and demonstrating understanding.

- **Strengthening Practical Training and School Internship**

Teacher preparation should include opportunities for observing and teaching in diverse classroom environments. Internships, case-based learning, classroom simulations and reflective teaching activities can help prospective teachers understand the practical requirements of inclusive education.

- **Organising Specialised Professional Development Programmes**

Professional development programmes should address specific competencies required for inclusive teaching. These may include:

  - Identification of diverse learning needs.
  - Differentiated instructional planning.
  - Inclusive classroom management.
  - Adaptation of teaching-learning materials.
  - Formative and alternative assessment.
  - Use of assistive technology.
  - Development of positive attitudes towards diversity.

- **Encouraging Collaborative Teaching Practices**

Collaboration between general teachers and special educators can strengthen classroom support. Joint lesson planning, shared assessment, peer consultation and collaborative problem-solving can help teachers address diverse learning requirements more effectively.

- **Developing Reflective Teaching Practices**

Teachers should regularly examine their instructional methods, classroom interactions and assessment practices. Reflective journals, peer observations, feedback and self-evaluation can help teachers identify areas requiring improvement and develop more inclusive approaches.

- **Improving School Leadership and Institutional Support**

School administrators should establish a supportive environment in which teachers receive appropriate guidance, resources and professional opportunities. Institutional planning should address accessibility, teacher workload, learning materials and collaboration among educational stakeholders.

- **Promoting Accessible Assessment Practices**

Assessment should provide appropriate opportunities for learners to demonstrate their understanding and progress. Teachers should use varied assessment methods, constructive feedback and suitable accommodations while maintaining meaningful learning expectations.

Emerging Issues and Future Directions

The development of inclusive education is influenced by changing social conditions, technological developments and emerging educational requirements. Therefore, teacher preparedness should be understood as a continuous process rather than a one-time professional achievement. Several emerging issues require greater attention in teacher education and inclusive classroom practices.

- **Digital Inclusion and Accessibility**

The increasing use of digital learning platforms has created new opportunities for educational participation. However, unequal access to devices, internet connectivity and accessible digital content may create additional barriers. Future teacher education programmes should strengthen digital accessibility and technological competencies.

- **Intersectionality and Multiple Disadvantages**

Learners may experience overlapping disadvantages related to disability, gender, poverty, language and social background. Teachers should develop an understanding of these intersecting conditions rather than treating learner differences as isolated categories.

- **Inclusive Education and Artificial Intelligence**

Artificial intelligence offers possibilities for personalised learning, language support and accessible educational materials. However, teachers need awareness of accessibility, data privacy, algorithmic bias and the limitations of AI-based educational applications.

- **Mental Health and Socio-Emotional Support**

Inclusive classrooms should address learners' emotional well-being, confidence and sense of belonging. Teachers require appropriate skills to recognise emotional difficulties and create supportive learning environments, while referring specialised concerns to qualified professionals.

- **Continuous Evaluation of Teacher Preparedness**

Teacher preparedness should be evaluated through classroom practices, professional reflection, student participation and institutional support rather than relying only on training attendance or certification.

- **Strengthening Research and Evidence-Based Practices**

Further research is required to understand how teacher preparation programmes influence actual inclusive classroom practices in different educational settings. Evidence-based approaches can help improve teacher education curricula and institutional planning.

Discussion

The examination of teacher preparedness in the context of NEP 2020 indicates that inclusive education is not simply a matter of providing admission to learners with diverse needs. It requires a broader transformation in the way teachers understand diversity, plan instruction, interact with students and evaluate learning. Teachers are expected to create classroom environments in which differences are recognised as an ordinary feature of education rather than as obstacles to teaching. The literature discussed in this paper suggests that teacher knowledge, attitudes and practical competencies are closely connected with the development of inclusive classroom practices. Avramidis and Norwich (2002) highlighted the influence of teacher attitudes and educational support conditions on the acceptance of inclusion. Similarly, Sharma et al. (2008) demonstrated the relevance of professional training in shaping pre-service teachers' attitudes and concerns. These findings suggest that teacher preparation should address both professional knowledge and personal attitudes. Florian and Black-Hawkins (2011) offer an important perspective by emphasising inclusive pedagogy that extends learning opportunities to all learners. This approach challenges the assumption that educational support must always be organised separately for students with additional needs. It encourages teachers to develop flexible instructional practices that benefit diverse learners within the

same classroom. The provisions of NEP 2020 create opportunities to strengthen these competencies through teacher education reforms and continuous professional development. The policy's emphasis on 50 hours of annual CPD provides an important institutional direction. However, the effectiveness of professional development depends on the relevance, continuity and practical application of training. Desimone (2009) and Darling-Hammond et al. (2017) highlight important characteristics of effective teacher professional development, including content focus, active learning, collaboration, coherence and sustained engagement. The discussion also indicates that teacher preparedness cannot be separated from institutional conditions. Even professionally competent teachers may face difficulties in implementing inclusive practices when classrooms lack appropriate resources, accessible infrastructure, specialised support and administrative cooperation. UNESCO (2020) similarly emphasises that teachers need appropriate preparation and systemic support to respond to learner diversity.

Therefore, effective inclusive education requires a coordinated approach involving teacher education institutions, schools, policymakers, families and communities. Teacher preparedness should be strengthened through an integrated combination of pre-service education, practical exposure, continuous professional learning, collaborative teaching and institutional support.

Conclusion

Inclusive education represents an important commitment towards ensuring equitable and meaningful educational opportunities for all learners. Its successful implementation depends considerably on the preparedness of teachers, who are responsible for translating educational principles and policy objectives into classroom practices. Teachers need appropriate professional knowledge, positive attitudes, pedagogical flexibility, assessment skills, technological competencies and collaborative abilities to respond effectively to learner diversity. NEP 2020 provides an important policy framework for strengthening inclusive education through its emphasis on equity, teacher education reforms and continuous professional development. Nevertheless, policy provisions alone cannot guarantee the development of inclusive classrooms. Challenges such as inadequate professional training, limited practical exposure, negative attitudes, large class sizes, insufficient resources and institutional barriers require systematic attention. The paper emphasises that teacher preparedness should be developed as a continuous professional process supported by appropriate teacher education curricula, practical training, mentoring, collaborative practices and accessible educational resources. Universal Design for Learning, differentiated instruction, flexible assessment and assistive technology can further contribute to making classroom practices more responsive to diverse learners.

Ultimately, inclusive education requires a shift from viewing learner diversity as a difficulty to recognising it as an essential characteristic of the educational process. Teachers should be supported not only to understand the principles of inclusion but also to implement them confidently and effectively. The vision of NEP 2020 can be meaningfully advanced when teacher preparedness becomes a central priority of educational planning, institutional development and professional practice.

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