

## ISSUES AND CHALLENGES OF INCLUSIVE EDUCATION IN CONTEXT OF NATIONAL EDUCATION POLICY (NEP), 2020

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### Abstract

*The global concern of education for all has been our focus since last few decades. Inclusive education is an educational system that provides opportunities for marginalized children & other children with special needs to pursue education at mainstream schools along with normal students. Our focus has been on bringing those children into mainstream education who somehow are left out of it. These particularly include Socio-Economically Disadvantaged Groups (SEDGs) such as schedule castes, schedule tribes, OBCs, minorities, girls, third-gender and disabled children. Present paper however focuses particularly upon education of children with disabilities.*

**Keywords:** *Inclusive Education, National Education Policy, 2020, Issues, Challenges, Special Education, Children with Special Needs.*



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### Introduction

The educational requirements of pupils or students suffering from any of a wide range of physical disabilities, intellectual difficulties, or emotional problems, including deafness, blindness, learning difficulties, and behavioral problems are completely different from their so-called normal counterparts. The National Policy on Persons with Disabilities (2016) demands that state must endeavor to ensure a dignified life for persons with disabilities. It cannot happen without a provision of quality education for one and all, catering to all kinds of individual differences.

Inclusive education is a new approach where normal children and children with special needs come together at the same platform to share same education system, means all children in the same classrooms, and school to interact socially and personally. According to Hasan & Islam (2020), “An inclusive educational setting in the mainstream school ensures equal and quality education along with need-based learning environment and all way participation for all students regardless of background.”

The global education development agenda reflected in the Goal 4 (SDG 4) of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, adopted by India in 2015 - seeks to “ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all” by 2030. Such a lofty goal will require the entire education system to be reconfigured to support and foster learning, so that all of the critical targets and goals (SDGs) of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development can be achieved. (NEP, 2020; introduction, p.3).

Inclusion promotes equity, access, opportunity and the rights of children with disability in education. It maintains social balance by providing equal opportunity to all and contribute to reducing discrimination. *Sarv Shiksha Abhiyan* (SSA, 2002) speaks about free and compulsory education to the children of 6-14 years of age group including children with disabilities. Inclusive education plays a vital role to fulfill the aim of Universalization of Education by making children with disabilities a part of the mainstream schooling.

### **Inclusive Education in Context of NEP, 2020**

NEP, 2020, is the third Education Policy in India. It was passed by the Union Cabinet, Government of India, on 29 July 2020. It is proposing major changes in our education system. This policy is divided into four parts consisting of 27 articles. Article 6 mainly talks about Equitable and inclusive education at school level while Article 14 explains about equity and Inclusion in higher education.

To understand Inclusive education in the context of NEP, 2020, one needs to recognize certain national and international documents considered as obligations and starting points for the policy.

The first obligation arises out of United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD), 2006 which India signed and ratified in 2007. Its article 24 (1) on Education demands that “..... States Parties shall ensure an inclusive education system at all levels and lifelong learning....”. India has thus an obligation to provide inclusive education at all levels and in all forms of education.

The second obligation for inclusive education arises from the “The Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act (RPWD Act), 2016”. The RPWD Act in its Chapter III on Education directs via its Article 16 that “The appropriate Government and the local authorities shall endeavour that all educational institutions funded or recognized by them provide inclusive education to the children with disabilities....

Hence, Inclusive Education becomes an obligation for our country. So, NEP, 2020, had to provide specific measures for implementing Inclusive Education at all levels.

The fundamental principles mentioned in the introductory part of NEP, 2020 (pp. 5-6) that will guide both the education system at large, as well as the individual institutions within it include among others the following:

- **Full equity and inclusion** as the cornerstone of all educational decisions to ensure that all students are able to thrive in the education system.
- **Recognizing, identifying, and fostering the unique capabilities of each student**, by sensitizing teachers as well as parents to promote each student’s holistic development in both academic and non-academic spheres;
- **Respect for diversity** and respect for the local context in all curriculum, pedagogy, and policy, always keeping in mind that education is a concurrent subject
- **Flexibility**, so that learners have the ability to choose their learning trajectories and programmes, and thereby choose their own paths in life according to their talents and interests
- **Extensive use of technology** in teaching and learning, removing language barriers, increasing access for Divyang students, and educational planning and management.
- **Education is a public service**; access to quality education must be considered a basic right of every child.
- **life skills** such as communication, cooperation, teamwork, and resilience

Hence, we may assume that NEP, 2020 strongly endorses and focuses on implementing inclusive education at all levels in all educational institutions.

### **Issues and Challenges**

On the basis of a thorough study of NEP, 2020; following issues and challenges have been identified in relation to implementation of inclusive education at all levels in all educational institutions:

1. Early Childhood Care & Education (ECCE) has been recognized by the Government of India for the very first time in NEP, 2020. The responsibility has been handed over to Anganwadi, *Ashramshalas* and alternate schools. However, a simple observation of these tells us that these are not equipped enough to provide quality inclusive ECCE to all the children. Even the government schools in our country have not yet been able to fully implement inclusive education.
2. This policy, talks about safe infrastructure like working toilets, clean drinking water, computing devices for Children with Special Needs (CWSN), and technology-based tools but in reality, there is unavailability of such infrastructure at educational institutions of all levels.
3. As for as primary education is concerned, the first problem is that there are no trained teachers skilled and equipped to effectively implement inclusive education. Necessary facilities are not available for the initial professional preparation of pre-service and in-service educators and their continuous professional development (CPD).
4. There is no system to career progression- related incentives for teachers.
5. Universal design for learning (UDL) is not specified in this policy.
6. This policy is silent about life skill involvement for disabled child. Nothing new has been said about the teachers' and administrative attitudes regarding inclusion.
7. Community participation increase as induced by community-based rehabilitation (CBR) is missing in the policy.
8. Teaching proficiency is discussed at primary, secondary and higher education level but the policy is not clear about competency and appropriate technology-based training.
9. We cannot benefit and include the children with severe & profound disabilities in inclusive education. For such children, we have to think of alternate systems which again is unaddressed in NEP, 2020.
10. NEP, 2020 follows RPWD act, 2016 to the fullest. But due to Covid-19 pandemic, many changes have taken place in inclusive education. Therefore, to implement NEP 2020, it will have to be modified.

## **Conclusions**

On the basis of above discussion, we may conclude that:

- NEP, 2020 has been rooted on the foundations of equity and equality. The policy has tried to address issues arising out of national and international obligations with regard to inclusive education.

- This policy has fully accepted the inclusion but how to implement it at all levels of educational institutions is not explained clearly. So, there is a need to reconsider this policy and make amends accordingly.

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