Inclusive Education in NEP 2020: Changes Vs Challenges

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Abstract:

Over the years, the Government of India came with various policies on education inclusive education such as the RPwD Act 2016. All the policies emphasized the right of the child from diverse backgrounds and abilities to access formal education but still, the disparities continued. After 34 years, finally we have our long waited National Education Policy. Since around 36 million of them lack viable alternatives. Rural Indians, constituting 78% of the population, lack access to special education. Governments must impart inclusive classroom training to educators to bridge the gap. (Sudhakar and Mareesh , 2020)Inclusive education is a significant focus in the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 of India. The policy emphasizes ensuring equitable access to education for all children, regardless of their socio-economic background, physical or mental abilities, gender, or location. NEP 2020, encourages, and promotes "Barrier-free access to Education for all Children with Disabilities." Which describes the much-awaited new reforms that India was looking for. These adaptations are designed with special consideration for children with impairments and those from low-income families. (Kumar and Singh, 2022)This paper is an attempt to discuss the new provisional changes and challenges for Inclusive Education in NEP 2020.

Keywords: *NEP 2020, Education, Inclusion, Critical Study.*

Introduction:

"A nation is advanced in proportion to education and intelligence spread among the masses." (*Swami Vivekananda*)

Education is a fundamental right of every Indian citizen. All children in the age group of 6-14 years irrespective of any diversity are ensuring to access free and compulsory education by the RTE act 2009. (UNESCO, 2000) 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. It addresses the common goals of decreasing and overcoming all exclusion from the human right to education, at least at the elementary level, and enhancing access, participation and learning success in quality basic education for all." In the year 2015, India adopted the 2030 agenda for sustainable development. The goal 4 of SDG mentioned to "ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all" by 2030 (NEP,2020). This is a very comprehensive policy covering all the level of education. The policy spread into four parts. Equitable and inclusive education is cover under school education (NEP,2020) India as a country of diversity, always see

these diversities as an opportunity similarly now it's time that the mindset of people to change and see every disability as a special ability. That is to focus on what these children can do better rather than merely focusing on things that they cannot do. From segregation to inclusion, the inclusive education system in India goes through several hurdles. To look at the disability as a special ability, it's required a change in the mindset. Finally, the government of India came up with such a policy which include the minute details. (Juni Khyat, 2020) The NEP document is seemingly holistic keeping with the United Nations' Vision 2030 and the Sustainable Development Goal 4 on inclusive education for all. (Papia Sengupta, 2022)The act also emphasised on the barrier free access as a non-discrimination measure (Narayan, John 2017).

Objectives:

- To study the Potential challenges and gaps in implementation.

- To study the Socio-economic and cultural barriers that might hinder the effectiveness of inclusive policies in NEP 2020

- To study the Comparison with previous policies and global standards.

Objective 1: To study the Potential challenges and gaps in implementation.

Inclusive education is a significant focus in the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 of India. The policy emphasizes ensuring equitable access to education for all children, regardless of their socio-economic background, physical or mental abilities, gender, or location. Here are the key aspects of inclusive education in NEP 2020:
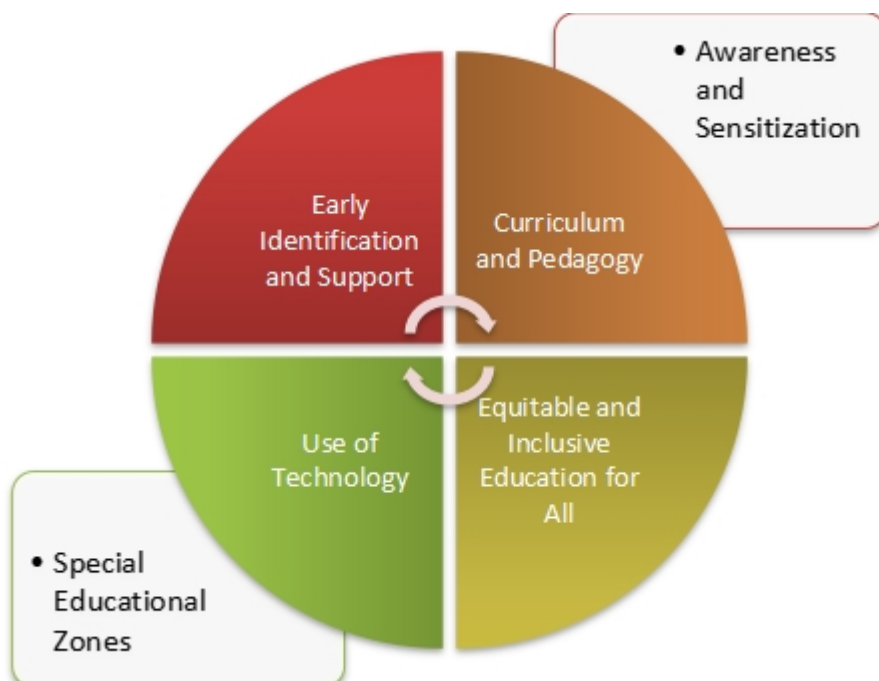
NEP 2020 stresses the importance of providing equitable education opportunities to all children, including those from historically marginalized, disadvantaged, and underrepresented groups. This includes children with disabilities, girls, children from Scheduled Castes (SCs), Scheduled Tribes (STs), Other Backward Classes (OBCs), and minorities. The policy emphasizes early identification of learning disabilities and other special needs to provide timely support. This involves regular screening and appropriate interventions to help children overcome barriers to learning. NEP 2020 calls for the creation of barrier-free access to education,

ensuring that school infrastructure is accessible to all, including ramps, adapted toilets, and other facilities to support children with disabilities. The policy advocates for the inclusion of flexible curricula and pedagogy that cater to the diverse needs of students. This includes differentiated instruction, use of assistive technologies, and adapting teaching methods to accommodate various learning styles and abilities.

NEP 2020 highlights the need for teacher education programs to incorporate training in inclusive education. Teachers are to be equipped with the skills and knowledge to support diverse learners in the classroom, including those with special needs.The policy encourages the use of technology to enhance learning opportunities for students with disabilities. Digital content, assistive devices, and accessible online resources are promoted to ensure that learning materials are available to all students.NEP 2020 recommends increased scholarships and financial support for students from marginalized communities, including those with disabilities, to ensure that economic barriers do not hinder access to education.The policy proposes the creation of Special Educational Zones (SEZs) in regions with large populations from disadvantaged groups. These zones will receive additional support to ensure that children in these areas receive quality education.It calls for awareness programs to sensitize communities, parents, and peers about the importance of inclusive education. This aims to reduce stigma and promote an understanding of diversity in the education system.The policy outlines the need for robust monitoring and accountability mechanisms to track the progress of inclusive education initiatives. Regular assessments and evaluations will ensure that the goals of inclusivity are being met effectively.

Objective 2: To study the Socio-economic and cultural barriers that might hinder the effectiveness of inclusive policies in NEP 2020

Children with moderate to severe disabilities will be given the option of ordinary or special education. (NEP 2020, Part-I, Section 6.10).The school will be supported in providing tailored adjustments and support mechanisms to meet the needs of the child with disabilities and provide barrier-free access.(NEP 2020, Part-I, Section 6.11).NCERT will collaborate with professional groups such as DEPwD to create a national curricular framework. (NEP 2020, Part-I, Section 6.10).The curriculum will be adjustable based on kid strength, allowing children to work at their own pace.To integrate and involve the child in classroom activities, relevant technology-based tools and other assistive technologies, as well as teaching-learning materials that are adequate and language-appropriate, such as big print textbooks and Braille, will be made available at school. (NEP 2020, Part-I, Section 6.11).NEP 2020 discusses the reform of teacher education programmes. Sensitization, early intervention, support, and unique pedagogy for teaching children with disabilities will be an intrinsic part of teacher education programs.(NEP 2020, Part-I, Section 6.14)

The National Assessment Center, PARAKH, will develop rules and provide instruments for assessing children with disabilities. This will apply to all exams, including the admission test, from the foundational stage to higher education. (NEP 2020, Part-I, Section 6.13).Homeschooling will continue to be an option for children with severe and profound disabilities. The resource centers and special educators will provide assistance with homeschooling. For homeschooling, all rules and standards will be prepared in accordance with the RPwD Act of 2016. The orientation of the parents will be done through the technology-based solution, enabling the parents to satisfy their child's different educational needs. (NEP 2020, Part-I, Section 6.12).

Objective 3: To study the Comparison with previous policies and global standards.

India's earlier National Education Policies, particularly NEP 1968 and NEP 1986 (modified in 1992), laid foundational work for expanding education and improving quality but lacked a focused approach toward inclusive education. NEP 1968 primarily concentrated on broadening educational access and enhancing

educational standards, without explicitly addressing the needs of marginalized communities or children with disabilities. The NEP 1986 introduced the concept of a "National System of Education," which aimed to provide all students with equal access to educational content regardless of their backgrounds. However, it still fell short of adequately addressing the needs of differently-abled students and those from socio-economically disadvantaged groups, proposing their integration into regular schools but without the comprehensive support mechanisms that are emphasized in NEP 2020. On a global scale, inclusive education has been a significant focus, particularly through frameworks like the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), especially Goal 4, which stresses inclusive and equitable quality education. The UNCRPD mandates that signatory countries, including India, ensure inclusive education systems at all levels, prohibiting the exclusion of persons with disabilities from general education systems. SDG 4 further advocates for equal access to all levels of education for marginalized groups, including children with disabilities. NEP 2020 aligns well with these global standards, especially in its emphasis on universal access, curriculum reform, and the integration of technology. Its focus on teacher training and support mechanisms reflects global best practices, offering a more comprehensive approach to inclusive education compared to previous Indian policies.

However, the ambitious goals of NEP 2020 come with significant challenges. Adequate funding and resource allocation are crucial for the policy's success, particularly in building infrastructure and training educators. Additionally, effective monitoring and evaluation mechanisms are necessary to ensure that inclusive practices are consistently implemented across the country. Overcoming deep-seated cultural biases against marginalized groups will also require sustained effort and time, posing a significant challenge to the policy's effective implementation.

Conclusion:

NEP 2020 marks a significant shift towards inclusive education in India, with a vision that aligns with global standards. It improves upon previous policies by offering a more detailed and systematic approach to inclusivity, addressing the needs of all learners, and striving towards equity in education. However, the policy's success will largely depend on its implementation, particularly in ensuring that all educational institutions have the resources and training necessary to support inclusive education effectively.

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