

Approaches and Concerns of National Education Policy 2020 towards Inclusive Education

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.52403/ijrr.20230127>

ABSTRACT

Nowadays, inclusive education is a necessity rather than a privilege. Providing access to education for all children, both those with disabilities and those without, under one roof is a key component of the new educational philosophy known as inclusive education. A recent initiative, the National Educational Policy (NEP), 2020, aims to alleviate the rising inequality and injustice that now plague the nation's educational system. With a special focus on children and young, especially girls, from socially and economically disadvantaged groups, it envisions equitable and inclusive education for all. Aims of the study were to explain the different approaches of NEP 2020 towards an inclusion in school education and to discuss the different concerns of NEP 2020 about inclusion in higher education. It also aimed to point out the limitations of NEP 2020 towards promoting inclusive education in India. Present study was based on documentary research method followed by qualitative approach which used different primary and secondary sources of data as books, journal articles, official website, news reports, governmental reports, and international reports. The study found different approaches and concerns of NEP 2020 regarding implementation of inclusive education at school education and higher education. It also found that the NEP 2020 has some limitations in approaches and concerns to promoting and implementing inclusive education. Finally, the study was concluded that in spite of some limitations the NEP 2020 is a breakthrough step in the right direction of

promoting inclusive education in India. If all the approaches and concerns provided by NEP2020 are properly implemented then inclusive education in India will find new horizons and which will become a guide to the education system of the world.

Keywords: NEP 2020, Inclusive Education, Approach, Concern.

1.INTRODUCTION

A National Education Policy was created with a strong perspective to develop and modernise the Indian educational system after 34 years. The NEP 2020 initiative is a historic attempt to turn India into a knowledge giant and will enable the younger generation to succeed to new heights. Based on the recommendations of Kothari Commission, the first education policy was unveiled in 1968, and the second was unveiled in 1986. A revolutionary concept for educational reform is presented in the NEP 2020. It is a comprehensive policy that emphasises universities' multidisciplinary and multimodal approaches, including education that is supported by technology. It calls for higher education spending, up from the NEP 1968's proposed 6% of GDP. Less than 3% of the Indian government's budget goes into education currently. Questions are raised over its application and distribution between the central and state governments.

The NEP 2020 aids in our understanding of our nation's cutting-edge educational policy. In addition to discussing ideas, it highlights innovation in promoting equity in education. By 2030, the National Education Policy (NEP 2020) aims to "provide inclusive and equitable quality education and encourage lifelong learning opportunities for all". The subject of inclusive and equitable education has received a great deal of attention. According to the UNESCO's Guidelines for Inclusion (2005), inclusion is a process which is concerned with the identification and removal of barriers to education and ensures the presence, involvement, and success of all students and their diversity. Even if earlier educational policies recommended inclusive education to make education accessible to everyone, but there hasn't been any systematic effort to implementation of inclusive education in India.

Recently published Indian National Education Policy (NEP), 2020 initiated to provide unrestricted access to education for all children across the nation and it brings a new era of inclusion in the educational system and dispels darkness. The majority of the time, inclusive education in India has come at the expense of excluding kids with impairments. The children's barriers to school are frequently heightened by disability. In reality, it makes it more difficult for kids to receive school education. The fact that only 50% of people with disabilities are literate serves as evidence for this statement. Only 62.5% of impaired people in the age range of 3-35 have actually attended school. The policy includes numerous provisions to guarantee inclusive education. Numerous provisions are included in the policy to guarantee inclusive education. The purpose of this policy is to decipher the genuine meaning of inclusion in the education sector for impaired children by conducting a critical analysis of the education policy and searching through the too ambitious rules.

2. OBJECTIVES

- 2.1 To explain the different approaches taken by NEP 2020 towards inclusion in school education in India.
- 2.2 To discuss the different concerns of NEP 2020 about inclusion in higher education in India.
- 2.3 To point out the limitations of NEP 2020 towards promoting inclusive education in India.

3. METHODOLOGY

The present study was based on documentary research method followed by qualitative analysis. The centre of the document was NEP 2020 published by Ministry of Education, Government of India. For analyzing this main concerned document the study also used different primary and secondary sources of data as books, journal articles, official website, news reports, governmental reports, and international reports.

4. FINDINGS

4.1 Approaches and Concerns of NEP 2020 towards an Inclusive School Education:

The National Education Policy (NEP), 2020 places a strong emphasis on "Equitable and Inclusive Education," which promotes the notion that no kid should be denied access to a quality education because of their socio-economic status or cultural background. It has taken into consideration the issues raised by the Socio-Economically Disadvantaged Groups (SEDGs), which include women, transgender people, Scheduled Castes and Tribes, Other Backward Classes (OBCs), minorities, and other groups. Additionally, the NEP recommends that states and local community organisations work together to approach gender as a cross-cutting concern in order to achieve gender equality in education. The following approaches are recommended by NEP 2020 as ways to promote inclusion

and equal access to quality education for everyone:

1. The goal of the policy is to provide Divyang, also known as Children with Special Needs (CWSN), the same access to a high-quality education as any other child.
2. Developing new approaches to prevent inequalities in school education between underrepresented and disadvantaged populations in areas such as early childhood education, basic reading and math skills, access, enrollment, and attendance.
3. Additionally, a number of effective policies and programmes, including targeted scholarships, conditional cash transfers to entice parents to send their children to school, bicycles for commuting, and others, have notably expanded SEDG participation in the school education system in some places. It is necessary to spread these beneficial programmes and policies across the entire nation.
4. Studies on the policies that work best for particular SEDGs must also be taken into account while developing the policy. Due to the safety and convenience they offer to parents, providing bicycles and organising cycling and walking groups to provide access to school, for instance, has been demonstrated to be particularly useful in encouraging female student involvement - even over shorter distances.
5. Some children with disabilities can benefit greatly from one-on-one teachers and tutors, peer tutoring, open schooling, adequate infrastructure, and appropriate technological interventions to provide access. Children from low-income households benefit the most from early childhood education programmes in high-quality schools.
6. In the meanwhile, research has demonstrated that children in urban impoverished communities benefit significantly from having counsellors and/or well-trained social workers who work with and interact with students, parents, schools, and teachers to improve attendance and learning results.
7. The data demonstrates that some geographical regions have a disproportionately higher density of SEDGs than others. Geographical areas known as Aspirational Districts need specialised interventions to help them meet their educational objectives. In order to thoroughly restructure their educational landscape, it is suggested that areas of the country with significant populations from SEDGs be classified as Special Education Zones (SEZs), where all programmes and policies are fully implemented through further coordinated efforts.
8. It is important to note that women comprise around half of all underrepresented groups and roughly half of all SEDGs. Unfortunately, these SEDGs reinforce the injustice and alienation that women suffer. The NEP 2020 also highlights the special and significant role that women play in society and in establishing social norms; as a result, ensuring that girls receive high-quality education is the most efficient approach to raise education levels for these SEDGs in both the present and the future generations.
9. The Indian government will also establish a “Gender-Inclusion Fund” to aid states in funding and expanding community-based initiatives that address regionally unique obstacles to female and transgender children’s access to and participation in education. The ultimate goal of this policy is to close any residual gaps preventing children of any gender or other socioeconomically disadvantaged groups from accessing education (including vocational education).

10. In school locations where students might have to travel a long distance, especially for students from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds, free boarding facilities will be built with appropriate arrangements for the safety of all children, especially girls. These facilities will match the standard of Jawahar Navodaya Vidyalayas.
11. Children with disabilities would be under inclusion and equally involved in ECCE and the regular educational system, which would be given top priority. Children with disabilities will be able to take part in the regular educational process fully from the foundational stage to higher education.
12. As per the RPWD Act, 2016 children with disabilities have the choice of attending ordinary or special school. In collaboration with special educators, resource centres will support parents/guardians in achieving high-quality home schooling and skilling for students with severe or multiple disabilities. Resource centres will also fulfil the rehabilitation and educational requirements of these students. Children with profound and severe disabilities who are unable to attend school will still have the option of receiving an education at home.
13. A flexible curriculum that makes use of each child's abilities, the creation of an environment for appropriate evaluation and certification, and good teachers and appropriate technology are just a few examples of the specific actions that are needed to support the majority of students in classrooms who have significant learning disabilities.
14. State governments may be persuaded to establish NCC wings in their secondary and higher secondary schools under the auspices of the Ministry of Defense, especially in regions where tribes predominate. By doing this, children's innate talent and special potential can be realised, enabling them to pursue a fruitful military career.
15. A single organisation and website will organise and publicise all scholarships, other opportunities, and programmes accessible to SEDG students, ensuring that all students are aware of, and may apply in a simple manner on such a "single window system" as per eligibility.
16. All of the aforementioned practises and policies are vital but fall short of what is required to fully achieve inclusion and equity for each and every SEDG. It's also necessary to change institutional culture. The needs of all children, the principles of inclusion and equity, as well as the respect, dignity, and privacy of all people, will be taught to teachers, principals, administrators, counsellors, and students.
17. Students will become more sensitive as a result of this new school culture, which will be implemented by teachers, counsellors, and professional social workers, as well as corresponding modifications in the curriculum to make it more inclusive. From the start, the school curriculum will include lessons on respect for all people, empathy, human rights, tolerance, gender equality, global citizenship, nonviolence, equity, and inclusion. The curriculum will be free of prejudice and preconceptions, and more information that is pertinent to and relatable to all groups will be introduced.
18. Additionally, the policy intends to recruit special educators in all school complexes to ensure that instruction is more inclusive and cognizant to the needs of students. The best educational resources will be made available to children with benchmark disabilities who choose to be home schooled, and they will be permitted to do so and given access to qualified home schooling teachers.

19. Teachers will also receive training on how to recognize learning disabilities in children at a young age and how to support these students in succeeding in school and taking care of their mental health.
20. For the purpose of developing fair and equitable systems of assessment procedures for students with learning disabilities, the National Assessment Center, PARAKH, will be developed.

4.2 Approaches and Concerns of NEP 2020 about Inclusion in Higher Education:

This is true even though the Indian education system and subsequent government policies have made steady progress in closing gender and social category gaps at all levels of school education. Large disparities persist, especially at the secondary level, particularly for socioeconomically disadvantaged groups who have historically been underrepresented in education.

Socio-Economically Disadvantaged Groups (SEDGs) can be categorised based on gender identities (particularly those of women and transgender people), socio-cultural identities (including those of Scheduled Tribes, Scheduled Castes, OBCs, and minorities), geographical identities (including those of students from villages, small towns, and aspirational districts), disabilities (including learning disabilities), and socio-economic conditions (such as low income households, migrant communities, children in vulnerable situations, orphans including child beggars in urban areas, and the urban poor, victims of or children of victims of trafficking). Even though attendance in schools decreases steadily from Grade-I to Grade-XII, it is significantly more noticeable for each of these SEDGs, with female students experiencing even greater falls within each of these SEDGs and declines that are typically steeper in higher education. An overview of the inclusion of SEDGs that also include socio-

cultural identities is given in the following subsections:

1. U-DISE data from 2016–17 shows that 17.3% of secondary school pupils come from Scheduled Castes, a decrease from the primary school level's 19.6%. For students from Scheduled Tribes (10.6 percent to 6.8%) and those with disabilities (1.1 percent to 0.25 percent), enrollment reduces significantly, with female students in each of these groups experiencing far greater declines. Even more drastically, enrollment in higher education has decreased.
2. A number of issues, such as a lack of access to decent schools, poverty, societal mores and customs, and language, have had a negative impact on the enrollment and retention rates for the Scheduled Castes. One of the key objectives would be to eliminate the disparities in access, engagement, and learning outcomes for children from Scheduled Castes. Other Backward Castes (OBCs), which have historically been classified as socially and educationally backward, also require special attention.
3. In the school and higher education sectors, there are similar dynamics and many of the reasons why SEDGs are excluded from the educational system. As a result, both school and higher education must use the same approach to equity and inclusion. To promote sustainable reform, there must also be continuity among the stages. In order to achieve the aims of equity and inclusion in higher education, policy efforts must be read in conjunction with those for school education.
4. Due to geographical and historical causes, tribal people and children from Scheduled Tribes confront a lot of challenges. Children from tribal cultures frequently believe that their education in school is culturally, intellectually, and practically irrelevant to their life. Numerous

programmatic initiatives are being made now and in the future to lift up children from tribal communities, but special strategies must be developed to guarantee that tribal children gain from these interventions.

5. Both secondary and higher education are underrepresented by minorities. The Policy acknowledges the significance of initiatives to support education of minority children, particularly those from communities that are underrepresented in schools.

4.3 Limitations of NEP 2020 on Promoting Inclusive Education in India:

The NEP appears to be over ambitious and utopian on this front. The establishment of any organisation to create guidelines and control inclusive education is not advised by NEP 2020. It ignores the fact that the majority of teachers are not just inadequately prepared for these specialised roles, but that the majority of Indian schools are also egregiously understaffed. The policy is also vague or ambiguous regarding how it intends to develop accessible alternatives to traditional home-schooling. Data from the 2011 Census shows that 2.7 crore people in India have suffered form of disability. This makes up around 2.2% of the entire population. According to the U-DISE data gathered from all Indian schools in 2016–17, there are 24 lakh children with differently abled. Less than 1% of all students in our school education system are represented by this. For example, the Delhi Child Rights Commission recently has conducted an examination and found that up to 60% of schools reported having no children with disabilities and another 28% reported having less than 1%. (Kundu, June 19, 2019). It emphasised that people with disabilities are more likely than people with disabilities are set to experience adverse socio-economic outcomes than persons without disabilities.

The audit of home-based education in accordance with RPWD's criteria might also not be valid because RPWD's provision for inclusive education calls for accessible classrooms and buildings as well as tailored support for complete inclusion. There are no adequate guidelines for home-based education, including ones regarding curriculum, methodology, and assessment. In an area with an unbalanced student teacher ratio, one-on-one teachers, tutors, and technological interventions will be the biggest obstacles to reaching the target. And one of the biggest issues with many of the schools is still the lack of access to technology.

The new policy does not outline a strategy for guaranteeing to access these people for schooling. Additionally, it doesn't provide any direction to modify the curriculum in order to avoid students with learning difficulties from experiencing exclusion in the current Indian education system.

5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

In NEP 2020, under the heading of Socio-Economically Disadvantaged Groups, the conventional category of marginalising the disabled has been relocated to a larger categorization (SEDGs). This may break down the barriers and segregation of such children in society at large and in the educational system in particular, encouraging teachers and parents to view the education of such children favourably. By including the provisions for schools of differently-abled children indicated in RTE 2012 and RPWD 2016, such as neighbourhood schools, special schools, and home-based education, NEP 2020 eliminates the confusion or misunderstanding about the options for schools for children with disabilities. It gives parents the freedom to select the kind of school their children will attend based on the type of disabilities. However, the lack of inclusive schools and special schools in many rural areas of our nation will serve as a reality

check for the achievement of this goal. Few schools currently offering inclusive education are not functioning or progressing in sufficient ways to achieve the goal.

It is believed that NEP 2020 is a step in the right direction for inclusive education and inclusive growth of the nation. The NEP emphasises gender equity and inclusion while keeping in mind the UN 2030 Agenda's "Leave no one Behind" principle. It also acknowledges the high dropout rates among socioeconomically vulnerable minority. The goal has been to ensuring that everyone has access to education, particularly those who are left out owing to access barriers caused by geographically difficulty. The NEP has combined gender identities, socio-cultural identities, disabilities, regional identities, and socio-economic conditions to establish a new social group called SEDGs to specifically address their educational requirements. The NEP suggests that those who live in educationally underserved areas be included in Special Education Zones (SEZs). This would enable the greatest possible effort to be made to alter the educational environment in these areas.

The objective of NEP 2020 is admirable, but putting it into practice will be difficult, and much will depend on how well the plan is executed at the ground level of our educational system. If the NEP 2020 is successfully implemented in schools, higher education patterns, and curricula, only academic and administrative changes will be discernible. The implementation of NEP 2020 will be fraught with difficulties, but the new educational strategy will undoubtedly eliminate barriers across curricula and make bridge among disciplines, which is essential for the jobs of the future generation. Academics, institute owners, and regulatory bodies, among other education stakeholders, will all need to adopt new perspectives. The pedagogy will be significantly impacted by digitalization. The focus must switch from

knowledge exchange to employability and quality. Traditional education, on the other hand, will always be an ongoing process. Both students and teachers would need to undergo mandatory training, development, and upgrading.

The government and other NGOs should place a greater emphasis on budgetary allocation for disability education, improving working conditions for teachers and special educators, removing stigma and barriers based on attitudes toward disabilities, and taking steps to integrate more people with disabilities into mainstream society in order to create an inclusive and equitable society. If NEP 2020 is correctly planned, designed, and put into action, it will fundamentally alter the intellectual and socioeconomic foundation of the country which will promote the path of an inclusive and equitable society.

Declaration by Authors

Acknowledgement: None

Source of Funding: None

Conflict of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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How to cite this article: Subhajit Jana, Tarini Halder. Approaches and concerns of national education policy 2020 towards inclusive education. *International Journal of Research and Review*. 2023; 10(1): 248-255. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.52403/ijrr.20230127>
