



EMERGING ISSUES AND PERSPECTIVES ON INCLUSIVE EDUCATION IN THE LIGHT OF NEP-2020

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Abstract

Inclusive education is a new and strategic educational approach. It is specifically designed to provide equal education opportunities to all children regardless of their disabilities. Despite of several efforts made by the policy-makers and other educational stakeholders to foster inclusivity, yet several potent factors hinder considerably the process of true inclusion. Such factors include attitudinal barriers and infrastructural constraints that negatively impact upon the practice of inclusive education in the country. The New Education Policy 2020 is a remarkable step adopted by the government that aims to create a vibrant and sustainable knowledge society. It has laid down several important recommendations for making the whole education system more inclusive as well as accessible for all children. Based on secondary sources of data, the present paper attempts to explore the special measures particularly being taken up by the new policy for establishing equitable, accessible, and inclusive quality education for all in India.

Keywords: Inclusive Education, Issues, Special Initiatives of NEP 2020, Implications, Suggestions.

Introduction

Education is a powerful tool that aims to build a strong foundation of a nation in terms of social, political, economic and cultural aspects. It helps to bring overall development of an individual's personality. Hence, it is fundamental human right to all irrespective of caste, class, sex, creed, disabilities, social and economic background. Education enables people to have equal access to all of their other basic human rights. In the recent times, the concept of inclusive education as an innovative and effective educational approach is very much notable. The main objective of inclusive education is to provide equal access and opportunities for education to all students. It ensures meaningful learning environment where both the disabled and non-disabled students learn in the similar regular classroom. It encompasses a wide range of rich learning activities that tends to address individual learning needs and problems. In such type of education system, students with diverse learning needs learn in the same classroom. This new approach is very much beneficial to improve the learning outcomes of all students. Therefore, it is necessary to implement inclusive educational approach in order to integrate disabled students with normal students into the mainstreaming education. Through inclusive education, it may be possible to overcome the problems faced by the disabled students in various spheres of their life. Very often, they face problems such as inferiority complex, lack of support and adjustment, disapproval in the society, feeling of insecurity and dependency and so on. Hence, inclusive education may be considered as the urgent

need of the hour to ensure full participation of all individuals in various aspects of their life. It helps to promote full potentialities of all individuals in terms of their personal, academic as well as professional aspects.

Inclusive Education

Inclusive education aims to provide equal educational opportunities to all students without any discrimination. The government of India adopted several measures to promote inclusive education in the country such as the **Integrated Education for Disabled Children Scheme (1974)**, **Inclusive Education of the Disabled at Secondary Stage (2009-10)**, **District Primary Education Programme (1994)**, the **National Policy on Education (1986)**, the **Project Integrated Education for the Disabled (1987)**, **Persons with Disability Act (1995)**, a **Comprehensive Plan of Action for Children and Youth with Disabilities (2005)**. The main objectives of inclusive educational approach are as follows-

- to ensure education for all students,
- protecting the rights of all individuals,
- identifying the individual learning needs and problems,
- recognizing the individual skills,
- Preparing students for their life,
- Infusing various social, moral and life skills,
- Improving students' quality of life,
- Addressing individual differences,
- Adapting effective teaching strategies for better learning outcomes.

Issues on Inclusive Education

There are several emerging issues that hinder the process of true inclusion in the society. Hence, it is required to tackle those issues judiciously so that the purpose of inclusive education can be achieved in a viable way. These includes-

1. **Raising awareness:** Awareness is needed to be developed among the people regarding the importance of inclusive education at local, regional, and national levels. This will help them to remove their negative mind set towards the disabled individuals.
2. **Receiving adequate parental support:** It is required in order to realize their children's actual needs with respect to personal, social, educational aspects. Parental support is also essential to understand and cater to the psychological needs of their children. Disabled individuals may easily overcome the challenges of their life if they receive sufficient guidance, care, and support from their family members.
3. **Implementation of the existing policies:** Several policies and programmes have been enacted on inclusive education by the government which require effective implementation at various levels. This appears to be another major issue that hampers the process of inclusive education. For proper implementation of the existing policies, adequate intervention of the government and non-government organization is highly essential.
4. **Inappropriate and inadequate necessary teacher training facilities:** For promoting inclusive educational approach, it is necessary to reframe the teacher training programmes and curriculum that may suited enough to address the major emerging issues on inclusive education in recent times.
5. **Less availability of specialized teaching and learning aids:** Due to the paucity of sufficient capital as well as human resources, it becomes a challenging task to teach children with diverse learning needs. In order to attain the desired learning outcomes, it is essential to practice individualized teaching and learning strategies. Trained educators are required to teach the students in an inclusive classroom with the help of specialized teaching and learning aids.
6. **Inadequate efforts of various educational stakeholders:** Adequate and active involvement of various stakeholders is highly essential to promote inclusive education in an efficient way. Without their sufficient cooperation and coordination, it may not be possible to actualize the process of inclusion in the society.

7. **Attitudinal barriers:** Negative attitudes of the family members and also of other members of the community towards disabled students is also an important cause that hinders effective implementation of this new approach. Unless and until the attitudinal barrier is removed, it may not be possible to solve the problems faced by the disabled individuals in various spheres of their life.
8. **Lack of required funds and infrastructural facilities:** These are the most important reason that hampers the process of true inclusion in the society. Due to insufficient funds for infrastructural setups and educational resources, the purpose of inclusive education may not be achieved efficiently. Necessary supervision and intervention are required by the government for the management and judicious utilization of the funds received for the purpose of inclusive education.
9. **Inappropriateness of the existing curriculum:** The nature of the existing curriculum is not suitable to fulfil the objectives of inclusive education. It appears to be more rigid to address the individual differences of the students. Hence, this poses another major issue towards the effective implementation of inclusive education.
10. **Prevalence of social discrimination towards disabled individuals:** This appears to be another important reason that hinders the implementation process of inclusive education in the country. The practice of sustained inequality among the individuals on the grounds of gender, caste, class, creed, illness, language, and disabilities in the society generates more prejudice, discrimination, stereotyping. The existence of such negative aspects effects the process of inclusion adversely.

Special initiatives of NEP-2020 towards Inclusive Education

The National Education Policy 2020 designed by K Kasturirangan Committee approved on 29th July, 2020 envisages an education system that aims to establish a vibrant, quality, and equitable knowledge society by ensuring equal educational opportunities to all. The special initiatives that have been taken up by the new policy particularly for the promotion of inclusive education in the country are discussed below:

1. **Recognizing the special needs of Socio-Economically disadvantaged Groups (SEDGs):** The policy aims to recognize the needs and requirements of the certain groups that are underrepresented in the existing system of education in the country. In order to address their educational needs and challenges, the policy recommends several measures that may help to reduce their drop out rates and increase their enrolment rate at various stages of education considerably. These measures include provisions for scholarships to the targeted groups, cash incentives to parents for their children's education purpose, providing bicycles to the children for transport.
2. **Recognizing the gendered identities:** The policy also recognizes the female and the transgender as the worst affected category of people that suffer from extreme level of violence and discrimination. In order to address their sufferings and needs in the society, the new policy proposes for the creation of **Gender-Inclusive Fund** for promoting inclusive educational practices specially for the women and transgenders. Such funds will enable the stated to address the context-specific localized problems by supporting and scaling up community-based local interventions. This may foster women and transgender individuals to have equal access to educational opportunities.
3. **Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalayas:** The policy proposes for the formation of KGBVs to promote better learning opportunities to the girl students especially those who face problems in access to education due to geographical barriers. It intends to provide hostel facilities to the girl students for overcoming such educational challenges.
4. **Recognizing the children with special needs:** One of the main aim of the new policy is to ensure equal education for all irrespective of their caste, class, gender, disabilities, social and economic backgrounds. The new policy attempts to incorporate children with special needs into the mainstreaming education as mentioned earlier by the RPWD Act, 2016. For addressing their individual diverse learning needs and difficulties, it suggests the recruitment of special educators at various stages of education system.

5. **Formation of Modified Assessment System:** The new policy suggests for the formulation of a modified as well as equitable assessment system specially designed for assessing the children with learning disabilities. PARAKH, National Assessment Centre are some of them that are entrusted with the responsibilities of such assessment procedures.
6. **Setting up of Special Educational Zones:** Another significant recommendation made by the new policy for the promotion of inclusive education is establishment of Special Economic Zones (SEZs). The main objectives for such creation of SEZs are to provide education to the people belonging to socially and economically disadvantaged groups and also to spread equal as well as quality education to the remotest places in the country. It recommends different choices of schools for accommodating different levels of disabilities of the students. These include formation of regular schools, resource centers and home-based schooling.
7. **Technology-mediated teaching and learning methods:** The policy stresses on technology-based teaching and learning procedures for wide-scale dissemination of learning materials of the CWSN. This may address their individual differences efficiently and enable them to learn better. Appropriate technology intervention, provision for assistive devices for the CWSN may help them to engage in the learning activities fully and actively with other students.
8. **Creation of flexible Curriculum and Individualized Programme:** The NEP 2020 suggests for the creation of flexible and student-centric curriculum for the educational betterment of disabled students. The policy also stresses adequate importance on school preparedness for providing individualized programme to all these disabled students according to their learning difficulties, needs and interests.

Implication of NEP 2020 towards Inclusive Education

The New Education Policy 2020 tends to ensure full inclusion of children with special needs in the education system. It has laid several important recommendations that may help to achieve fair and equitable education society and serve the purpose of inclusive education. The major implications are discussed below:

1. It is a remarkable step taken by the government in the country to solve the **emerging issues** of inclusive education. The education implications of NEP 2020 particularly for the **promotion of inclusive education** are very much notable.
2. The new policy may help to develop **positive attitudes** among the people towards disabled individuals. It may develop a sense of respect, belongingness, and care among all individuals.
3. It also tends to ensure **school preparedness** through the formation of **resource centers**, provision for **assistive devices** and other infrastructures, appointment of **special educators and counselors** in schools and at various levels of education to cater their individual problems and requirements.
4. The policy attempts to make the existing **curriculum more flexible and learner-centered**. It also emphasizes upon the provision for individualized programmes for bringing about desired and better learning outcomes of all the disabled as well as non-disabled students.
5. The new policy aims to create a **barrier-free environment** for all students regardless of any kind of their disabilities and socio-economic backgrounds.
6. It may help to generate enough **awareness** about the educational needs of the disabled individuals. It may provide enough opportunity to learn and accept individual educational needs and differences.
7. It aims to **identify the learning difficulties** of all students and provide support services to address their individual differences.
8. It may foster the development of **proper interaction and communication skills** among both the disabled and non-disabled students.
9. The new policy may **encourage parents and other stakeholders** to actively participate in the process of inclusive education.
10. It may **motivate** students with varying disabilities to learn better with others in the same regular classroom. It may provide for better and effective learning opportunities in a sustained manner. Hence, the new policy may be regarded as a strategic approach towards the promotion of quality inclusive education in the country.

Suggestions

It may be suggested that the government must take effective measures to develop awareness among the common people so that it is possible for them to remove any kind of negative attitudes towards the disabled individuals. This may help in the process of implementation of real inclusion in the different spheres of the society. Some of the suggestive measures that may be followed for its effective implementation are as follows:

1. The government is required to give adequate **emphasis upon the policies** as well as the **budgetary framework** to promote inclusive education in the country.
2. It is necessary to follow the **principles of inclusive education** by the educational stakeholders.
3. The **teacher training programmes** must be given adequate stress for improving the overall education system.
4. **Curriculum** is needed to be **reframed** according to the existing needs and problems of the individual learners. It must be student-centric and flexible enough.
5. Provisions for necessary **specialized teaching and learning aids** are to be made to address the diverse learning needs of the pupil.
6. Encouraging **active involvement** of all students to participate in co-curricular activities.
7. More **coordination and cooperation** are needed to fulfil the main objectives of inclusive education.
8. It is required to improve the **infrastructural facilities** of the learning environment for providing necessary arrangements to the disabled students. this enables them to learn at their own pace.
9. Provisions for **guidance and counselling** for all disabled and non-disabled students as important educational support services.
10. Special provision is also required for **proper assessment**.
11. Framing of proper norms and standards for the **formation of SEZs and home-based schooling**.
12. Maintenance of appropriate **teacher-pupil ratio** for ensuring quality and comprehensive inclusive education.

Conclusion

Inclusive education may be regarded as the only possible educational approach to bridge the gap existing between the disabled and non-disabled students. It aims to cater the educational needs of children with and without disabilities in an efficient way. Several major recommendations and special initiatives exclusively taken by the new policy for promoting inclusivity in the education system are very much commendable. For materializing such suggestive measures, it is required to gain full participation of all people in the society, active engagement of all educational stakeholders, removal of negative attitudes, addressing the context-specific local issues, encouraging community interventions, and providing sufficient necessary infrastructures to assist the process of inclusive education.

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