

PROVISIONS OF INCLUSIVE EDUCATION IN NATIONAL EDUCATION POLICY-2020

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Paper Received On: 22 JUNE 2022

Peer Reviewed On: 27 JUNE 2022

Published On: 28 JUNE 2022

Abstract

The National Education Policy-2020 is one of the milestones in the history of Indian education system. It is India's third education policy which replaces the 1986 National Education Policy. The purpose of this policy is to guide the development of "education system rooted in Indian ethos that contributes directly to transforming India, that is Bharat, sustainably into an equitable and vibrant knowledge society, by providing high-quality education to all, and thereby making India a global knowledge superpower" (NEP, 2020). The policy emphasises on Inclusion and Equity. The policy stated that "a good education institution is one in which every student feels welcomed and cared for, where a safe and stimulating learning environment exists where a wide range of learning experiences are offered and where good physical infrastructure and appropriate resources conducive to learning are available to all students". This paper is an attempt to highlight the provisions of inclusive education given in this policy with special reference to students with disabilities or Divyangjan. These provisions will ensure the contributions of students with disabilities also in the transforming India.

Keywords: NEP-2020, Inclusive Education, Students with Disabilities



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Introduction

According to the official website of Ministry of Education, the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 is formulated after having considered over 2 lakh suggestions from different levels of local self-bodies, 2.5 lakh gram panchayats, 6,600 blocks, 6,000 ULBs and 676 districts with the aim of holistic productivity and contributing citizens for building an equitable, inclusive, and plural society with an increased Gross Enrollment Ratio (GER) of 50% by 2035.

The National Education Policy 2020 is the first education policy of the 21st century. It aims to address the many issues faced by Indian education system in this new era. The policy is framed to improve Indian education system as par with the world class education system, through undertaking major reforms like quality, equity, and integrity into the system, from

early childhood care and education through higher education. This policy recommends the revision and revamping of all aspects of the education structure including the inclusive education for students with disabilities.

Understanding Inclusive Education

Inclusive Education is not a new concept in India, it was borrowed from UNESCO. Worldwide the concept of Inclusive education was started from 1990 Jomtien World Conference on Education for All. During this time, Spain embarked on a major project of “integration in schools” to mobilize and train the educational community, including teachers and parents to work towards a ‘school for all’ and lay the groundwork for new educational legislation. UNESCO, recognizing the possibility to adapt these good practices, invited Spain to share its experiences with developing countries at a high-level meeting held in October 1991 during the General Conference. Following this meeting, several seminars and consultations were organized with senior decision-makers from mainstream and special needs education in order to dialogue on creating inclusive schools, which respond to the wide range of pupil needs. This laid the groundwork for the Salamanca Conference and created a climate favorable to inclusion.

UNESCO’s Salamanca Statement (1994) called on the international community to endorse an approach of inclusive schools by implementing philosophical, practical and strategic changes. A total of 92 Governments and 25 international organizations agreed a dynamic new Statement in 1994 calling for inclusive education to be the norm and adopted a Framework for Action which said general education schools should include all children. India is also a signatory to the Statement. The Salamanca Statement (1994) strongly advocated inclusion with a human rights perspective by stating “inclusion and participation are essential to human dignity and the enjoyment and exercise of human rights.” This Statement further proclaimed: “Regular schools with inclusive orientation are the most effective means of combating discriminatory attitudes, creating welcoming communities, building an inclusive society and achieving education for all.” (Salamanca Statement, Art. 2).

NEP-2020 and Inclusive Education for Students with Disabilities

India adopted the UNESCO 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in the year 2015. NEP-2020 fully endorses this 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development particularly its Goal 4. Goal 4 is the educational goal of this agenda which aims to “ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all” by 2030. The aim of inclusion and inclusive education is at the heart of NEP 2020. Inclusive Education

involves restructuring the whole system with the aim of ensuring the inclusion of children with different needs. “The policy is designed to avoid segregation and isolation of ethnic and linguistic minorities, those with disabilities and also those who face learning difficulties due to language barriers and are at the risk of educational exclusion” (Anuja, 2020).

The NEP 2020 has recognized the importance of creating enabling mechanisms for providing children with disabilities or *Divyangjan*, the same opportunities of obtaining quality education as any other child. In this policy provisions & strategies for inclusion of students with disabilities are given in various paragraphs of Part-1 (School Education), Part-2 (Higher Education), and Part-3 (Other key areas of focus). Some of the important provisions for inclusion of Divyangjan in general education systems given in the policy are as follows:

- **Provision of Special Educators:** For providing quality education to students with disabilities as par with students without disabilities there is an urgent need for special educators. This new policy also endorses the urgent need for special educators in schools. Para 5.2.1 of this policy states that there is the need of additional special educators for certain areas of school education. These special educators should have specialist requirements including subject teaching for children with disabilities at the Middle and Secondary school level. Such teachers would require not only subject-teaching knowledge and understanding of subject related aims of education, but also the relevant skills for understanding the special requirements of children. Further this policy also emphasizes that there should be synergy between the course curriculum of NCTE and RCI to ensure adequate availability of qualified special education teachers who can handle subject teaching as well.
- **Provision of moving from General Educators to Special Educators:** This new policy has also included the provision that if a general education teacher wants to teach students with disabilities she can easily do this by doing a short term course. Para 5.26 of the policy reads, “Shorter post- B.Ed. certification courses will also be made widely available, at multidisciplinary colleges and universities, to teachers who may wish to move into a more specialized area of teaching, such as teaching of students with disabilities.”
- **Provision of Quality ECCE to Children with Disabilities:** This policy accepted the facts that in the present time status of Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) is not up to the mark. Para 1.1 of the policy states that quality ECCE is not available to

crores of young children, particularly children from socio - economically disadvantaged backgrounds. Strong investment in ECCE has the potential to give all young children such access, enabling them to participate and flourish in the educational system throughout their lives. This policy also emphasizes the universal provisioning of quality ECCE before the year 2030. Further this policy also ensures the inclusion and equal participation of children with disabilities in ECCE and the schooling system will also be accorded the highest priority (Para 6.10).

- **Provision of Admission in Regular Schools:** NEP 2020 has adopted the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (RPWD) Act 2016, which is specially designed to cater the needs of a person with disabilities. This policy also accepted the same definition of inclusive education given in the RPWD Act 2016 i.e. “Inclusive education is a system of education wherein students with and without disabilities learn together and the system of teaching and learning is suitably adapted to meet the learning needs of different types of students with disabilities”. This new policy is in complete consonance with all the provisions of RPWD act 2016 and endorses all its recommendations with regard to school education.
- **Provision of Establishment of School Complexes:** The NEP 2020 builds on the idea of a school complex first proposed by the Kothari Commission. A school complex is primarily a network of neighborhood schools led by one secondary school. These schools will function cooperatively, sharing teaching, staff, and infrastructural resources. Para 7.7 of this policy highlights the importance of school complexes and states that school complexes have numerous benefits such as improved support for children with disabilities, more topic center clubs and academic/ sports/craft/events across School complexes. Further the para 6.11 of this policy reads that school complexes will be provided resources for the integration of children with disabilities, recruitment of special educators with cross disability training, and for the establishment of resource centers, wherever needed, especially for children with severe or multiple disabilities.
- **Provisions for Availability and Accessibility of Learning Materials:** This new policy puts stress on barrier free environment, availability and accessibility of teaching learning materials to students with disabilities. Para 6.11 of this policy states that barrier free access for all children with disabilities will be enabled as per the RPWD Act 2016.

Since different categories of children with disabilities have different needs, therefore schools as well as school complexes will work and be supported for providing all children with disabilities accommodations and support mechanisms tailored to to suit their needs and to ensure their full participation and inclusion in the classroom. The policy also emphasizes the availability and accessibility of adequate assistive devices, textbooks and language appropriate teaching learning materials.

- **Provision of Indian Sign Language for Students with Hearing Impairment:** Sign language is one of the important components for teaching students with hearing impairment. NEP 2020 understands this essential component and that's why it provides the guidelines for standardizing the Indian Sign Language. Para 4.22 of the policy states that Indian Sign Language (ISL) will be standardized across the country, and national and state curriculum materials developed, for use by students with hearing impairment. Local Sign languages will be respected and taught as well, where possible and relevant.
- **Provision for Choice of Schooling Systems:** As per the RPWD act 2016, children with disabilities will have the choice of schooling system that is regular or special schooling. Para 6.12 of NEP 2020 endorses the provision of schooling system given in the RPWD Act 2016. Further this para states that resource centres in conjunction with special educators will support the rehabilitation and educational needs of learners with severe or multiple disabilities and will assist their parents in achieving high quality skills. This policy also puts stress on home based education for children with severe and profound disabilities who are unable to go to schools. The children under home based education must be treated as equal to any other child in the general system.
- **Specific Provision for Students with Learning Disabilities:** The NEP 2020 puts its weight on quality education for students with learning disabilities. Para 6.13 of the policy read as, "most classrooms have children with specific learning disabilities who need continuous support. Teachers must be helped to identify such learning disabilities early and plan specifically for their mitigation. Specific actions will include the use of appropriate technology allowing and enabling children to work at their own pace, with flexible curricula to leverage each child's strengths and creating an ecosystem for appropriate assessment and certification".
- **Provision for Assessment and Certification of Students with Disabilities:** The policy also highlighted the importance of assessment and certification of students with

disabilities. The policy gives direction to the existing assessment and certification agencies as well as the proposed new National Assessment Centre namely PARAKH, for formulation of guidelines and appropriate tools for conducting assessment of these types of students, in order to ensure equitable access and opportunities for all students with disabilities (Para 6.13).

- **Provision for Awareness of Disabilities in all Teacher-Training Courses:** To make inclusive education reality it is essential that every teacher should be aware about the needs of students with disabilities. These teachers should be well trained to teach students with disabilities alongside students without disabilities. Policy makers understand these important issue very well that's why they introduced the provision in newly made policy i.e. NEP 2020. Para 6.14 of the policy states that the awareness and knowledge of how to teach children with disabilities will be an integral part of all teacher education programs.
- **Provision in Higher Education for Students with Disabilities:** Higher education plays an important role in promoting human as well as social wellbeing. Providing quality higher education is still one of the challenges of the higher education system. This policy also puts its weight on quality higher education that must aim to develop good, thoughtful, well-rounded, and creative individuals. It further reads that a quality higher education must enable personal accomplishment and enlightenment, constructive public engagement, and productive contribution to the society. It must prepare students with and without disabilities for more meaningful and satisfying lives and work roles and enable economic independence. To include students with disabilities in higher education and provide them quality education the para 9.3 (i) of the policy reads that all infrastructure and learning materials should be accessible and available to learners with disabilities.
- **Provision for Adult Education and Lifelong Learning for Divyangjan:** This policy also stresses on adult education and lifelong learning. The policy states that the opportunity to attain foundational literacy, obtain an education, and pursue a livelihood must be viewed as basic rights of every citizen. Literacy and basic education open up whole new worlds of personal, civic, economic, and lifelong learning opportunities for individuals that enable them to progress personally and professionally. The policy suggests many recommendations for adult education and lifelong learning such as to

development of adult education curriculum framework, to develop suitable infrastructure so that every adult either disabled or non-disabled have access to education, to improve the availability and accessibility of books is essential to inculcating the habit of reading within our communities and educational institutions. This policy also recommends that all communities and educational institutions- schools, colleges and universities and public libraries- will be strengthened and modernized to ensure an adequate supply of books that cater to the needs and interests of all students, including students with disabilities and other differently-abled persons.

Conclusion

Though the concept of inclusive education is not new in India, still it is not implemented successfully. Policy makers are doing a good job by introducing new acts and policies for inclusive education. For inclusion of students with disabilities there is RPWD Act, 2016 which deals with 21 types of persons with disabilities, and it is one of the pioneer acts for persons with disabilities. National Education Policy 2020 is the first educational policy of India introduced after the emergence of the concept of inclusion by UNESCO, and also after Indian Govt. signatory on the United Nation Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD). Therefore, this policy has put its weight on inclusive education for children with disabilities. This policy has included many provisions and also recommended many suggestions for inclusive education of children with disabilities, so that these students can get quality education as per with other non- disabled students, and contribute effectively in transforming India. Now the ball is in the court of implementing agencies and stakeholders like principals and teachers to implement this policy effectively, so that the dream of *Sabka Sath and Sabka Vikas* can be achieved.

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