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NEP 2020 and Inclusive Education: Addressing Equity Challenges in Indian Education

Dr. K SUDHAKAR^{1*}

¹ Principal.

Abstract

At the core of our educational system is the National Education Policy -2020. This visionary is driving significant progress towards equality and equity in our educational system. The core idea of NEP-2020 is inclusion in mainstream education. Every policy's actual implementation in the field is always accompanied with a question mark. The use of remedies should be limited, and it is implied that all stakeholders, including parents and teachers, should intercept the difficulties in order to improve the effectiveness of all treatments. Through NEP 2020, this research reviewed the issues of equity and inclusive education in Indian schools. Inadequate infrastructure, restricted possibilities, low engagement, and the need for a more compassionate educational system were identified as the main issues. Notwithstanding the significant strides achieved by NEP 2020 in advancing inclusive teaching practices and digital technologies, enduring problems including inadequate infrastructure, poor teacher preparation, and uneven access to resources—especially for underserved communities—linger.

Keywords: Inclusive Education, NEP-2020, Equality and Equity, Indian education, Digital tools, etc.

1 Introduction

In order to transform the current system and make it more accessible, adaptable, and student-centered, "the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020" is a historic overhaul in India's educational environment. NEP 2020's primary goal is to make education accessible to everyone, with a special emphasis on socioeconomically disadvantaged groups (SEDGs), such as females, children with impairments, and members of marginalised communities [1]. With an emphasis on a comprehensive approach to education

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that starts with "Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE)" and continues through higher education, this strategy emphasises the need of removing structural obstacles that impede equitable participation in education [2]. Multilingualism is emphasised in NEP 2020, which acknowledges the value of mother language instruction in bolstering fundamental learning, especially for underprivileged kids. Technology integration is also essential for closing the digital divide, giving students in underserved and rural places access to digital resources and access [3]. By emphasising teacher preparation, the policy makes sure that teachers have the know-how to oversee inclusive classrooms and meet the various needs of their pupils. But there are a number of obstacles in the way of these policies' effective execution, including poor infrastructure, a lack of funding for teacher preparation, and systemic opposition to change. Community involvement is essential to attaining the entire framework that NEP 2020 lays out to promote fairness, inclusiveness, and high-quality education for everyone, notwithstanding these obstacles [4].

The sector with the greatest amount of implementation left is inclusive education since there are so many obstacles to every policy advice or suggestion. The transition from segregated to inclusive education is the result of historical processes [5]. The transition between integrated and inclusive education, as well as from segregated to integrated education, is profound and significant. Specially required people were formerly separated from society, but as time went on and improvements were made, this group was able to find basic satisfaction and eventually became more integrated into society, which brought them closer to all other kid groups [6]. Although they are in distinct situations, both groups get the same treatment under one roof. Following the country's independence, several committees and regulations recommended inclusive education in the domain as an alternative to integrated or special education. People must follow the principle that everyone is treated equally under one roof, even if some who are required are undoubtedly happy with special education to meet their unique needs [7].

A. Inclusive Education

A form of education known as inclusive education allows children with exceptional needs and skills that are yet manageable to study in the same classes as other students in conventional schools without any kind of discrimination. There are three primary approaches to integrating a kid into a mainstream classroom: mainstreaming, partial inclusion, and full inclusion [1]. The need of equal educational opportunities for students has been emphasised in "the National Policy on Education (NPE) 1986". Among its components were education for women's equality, Backward sectors, the education of minorities, the education of the disabled, and the education of the marginalised group of scheduled castes and scheduled tribes were all given particular consideration and provisions [8]. With a focus on historically marginalised, disadvantaged, and under-represented groups, the New Education policies seek to provide all students with high-quality education, irrespective of their caste, community religion, language, gender, disability, or socioeconomic circumstances. In order to achieve socioeconomic mobility, inclusion, and equality in disparities, education is regarded as the most potent weapon and an effective equaliser [9]. The following methods are some of the core ideas that the New Policy suggests be used to govern the educational system as a whole and the educational institutions that are part of it in fostering equality in learning and providing equal chances in education.

- Acknowledge, recognise, and highlight each student's special talents. raising awareness among educators and parents about the need of supporting each student's overall development in both academic and extracurricular domains.
- Remembering that education is a contemporaneous topic, respect the variety and local context that are present in the curriculum, pedagogy, and policies.
- In order to provide equitable access to education for all students, educational institutions must prioritise equity via inclusion and quality.

B. Equity

To make India a knowledge powerhouse, the NEP aims to establish a top-notch educational system grounded on Indian culture and values. The goal of equality is to provide everyone with the resources they need to thrive. All residents are given access to educational opportunities by considering their particular requirements and socioeconomic background [10]. Pre- and post-metric scholarships are provided, as well as free, excellent education, rural Navodaya schools, competitive exams, and specialised tutoring for students of SC and ST backgrounds in university courses [11].

C. Importance of Inclusive Education in India

The Indian setting, where a broad range of linguistic, cultural, and socioeconomic variables contribute to a huge discrepancy in access to high-quality education, makes inclusive education especially crucial. Numerous marginalised groups may be found in India, such as females, children from rural and economically underprivileged families, children with impairments, and members of minority cultures [1]. In the past, these groups have encountered structural obstacles to obtaining education, leading to notable educational disparities that sustain poverty and social marginalisation cycles. A key component of resolving these gaps is inclusive education, as defined by NEP 2020, which guarantees that all children, regardless of their circumstances, have the chance to learn and thrive [9]. A primary factor contributing to the importance of inclusion in India is the nation's dedication to accomplishing the "Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)", especially target 4, which is to provide inclusive and equitable, high-quality education for everyone. To achieve this aim and guarantee that no kid is left behind, India can make great progress by supporting inclusive education [12].

Furthermore, in a nation as varied as India, inclusive education is crucial to promoting national unity and social cohesion. It dispels stereotypes and promotes respect and understanding amongst kids from diverse origins by creating an atmosphere in which they may learn and develop together. This is particularly crucial in a nation where social relationships and opportunities are often governed by religion, caste, and economic standing [3]. Furthermore, by giving marginalised populations the information and skills they need to raise their socioeconomic standing and advance the growth of the country, inclusive education effectively empowers them. The stigma and isolation that are often connected to special education are lessened when students with disabilities have the opportunity to participate in general society via inclusive education [13]. "Furthermore, by guaranteeing that students in isolated and underprivileged regions have access to high-quality education, especially via the use of technology and distance learning,

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inclusive education in India may aid in bridging the rural-urban gap. In India, where millions of children still do not attend school, inclusive education is not only morally required, but also practically essential to the growth and development of the nation. India can create a society that is more fair, equal, and successful by guaranteeing that all children have access to education [11].

D. Inclusive education in NEP 2020

One of the main tenets of "the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020" is inclusive education, which reflects the resolution to guarantee that all children, regardless of background, have access to high-quality education in a setting that is encouraging and enabling. pupils from a variety of socioeconomic backgrounds, including as females, children with disabilities, pupils from "scheduled castes (SC), scheduled tribes (ST), and other minorities, would be accommodated under NEP 2020, which redefines inclusive education [14]. Bridging the learning gaps that have traditionally disadvantaged these groups is one of the main objectives of inclusive education under NEP 2020, guaranteeing that they have equal opportunity to achieve. First up is "Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE)", where NEP 2020 places a strong emphasis on providing all children with access to a fundamental education, especially those from underprivileged families. The strategy promotes curriculum flexibility in order to overcome the conventional one-size-fits-all approach and take into account students' diverse requirements, skills, and learning preferences [4]. This is further supported by the inclusion of multilingualism, which encourages children to study in their mother tongues or regional languages until at least grade 5, which is beneficial for students who do not speak English [5].

NEP 2020's inclusive education program also focusses on students with disabilities by highlighting the need of accessible classrooms and schools, which includes having the tools, technology, and supports needed to create more inclusive learning environments. NEP 2020 also emphasises the need of consistent training for teachers on inclusive education methods. The knowledge and abilities necessary to instruct a variety of student groups, including those with special needs, are required of teachers. Using inclusive teaching methods that guarantee all students have equal access to education and active engagement without prejudice or discrimination is part of this. This is made possible by NEP 2020, which suggests amending the B.Ed. curriculum to provide inclusive teaching practices training in teacher education programs [8].

The policy also emphasises how crucial it is to create an inclusive school climate where kids from underrepresented groups feel appreciated and encouraged and where diversity is acknowledged. In order to guarantee that students from socioeconomically disadvantaged groups have the resources they need to finish their education, NEP 2020 also includes financial assistance, scholarships, and other affirmative action initiatives. Girls are also covered by these regulations, with a focus on lowering female student dropout rates, particularly in secondary and postsecondary education [6]. The goal of NEP 2020 is to encourage females to pursue higher education, especially in STEM subjects, by introducing gender-sensitive policies and activities. The policy also acknowledges the value of community involvement in advancing inclusive education and calls for more cooperation between local communities, parents, and schools in order to create a more encouraging learning environment. Another key component of NEP

2020 is digital inclusion, which addresses the digital gap that disproportionately impacts marginalised communities, particularly in rural and remote locations. The goal of the strategy is to use technology to guarantee that, even in difficult situations, children from all backgrounds may get a top-notch education [10].

2 Literature Review

(Pancholi & Kumar Maurya, 2023) [15] Regular classrooms resemble NEP-2020. Lack of involvement, opportunity, infrastructure, and compassion are also apparent in education. These are the biggest barriers to inclusive education, but NEP-2020 offers mild and effective solutions. Resource availability, infrastructure, opportunity in all fields, and human support will fix the school system. Some of NEP-2020's inclusive education suggestions were already in "RTE-2009 Act, NPE-1986, NPE-1968", and other policies, but when implemented in regular classrooms, they are not justified and applied. These challenges must be highlighted to find better solutions. To address education gaps, NEP-2020 emphasises Sustainable Economic and Developmental Goals. This research sharply examines inclusive education, its contemporary obstacles, and solutions. This report reveals existing education system difficulties that NEP-2020 visionaries would reduce.

(Kalita, 2024) [1] Multilingual education, "early childhood care and education (ECCE)", and technology to reduce educational disparities are NEP 2020's goals. Teacher training is prioritised to help educators develop inclusive classrooms. These potential measures face implementation obstacles such as insufficient infrastructure, teacher training, and the digital divide. To promote inclusion, the strategy emphasises community engagement and stakeholder cooperation. This article examines NEP 2020's inclusive education policy, implementation obstacles, and ways to overcome them, assessing its potential to change India's educational environment. To understand how inclusive education may be implemented in India under NEP 2020, the paper examines successful case studies and worldwide best practices.

(Sethi, 2023) [13] The first 21st-century education policy in India is NEP-2020. It aims to improve India by 2030 by pursuing UN Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4's goals of "inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning". NEP-2020 is expected to be a major overhaul with less material and more problem-solving, innovation, and transdisciplinary and holistic thinking for unity and integrity. After reviewing NEP-2020, we developed and assessed general ways for achieving its aims via focus group conversations. We also assessed the policy's strengths and weaknesses in higher education and research. The new education policy aims to expand Indian education while improving quality. This report identifies educational system flaws and proposes fixes.

(Panda, 2024) [16] Every country must have a creative and progressive education strategy since education is vital to promoting social and economic development. The Sustainable Development Goals, which were set in 2015, demonstrate India's commitment to the global agenda for education development. According to SDG 4, by 2030, Establish equitable and inclusive access to high-quality education and promote opportunities for lifelong learning for all. All education sector development plans will include the NEP 2020 initiative, which seeks to reduce socioeconomic inequities in school

education's access, participation, and learning results. India's educational system will undergo a significant transformation as a result, becoming a more contemporary, progressive, egalitarian, and enlightened framework.

(Kumar, 2023) [17] The Union Cabinet of India adopted "the National Education Policy 2020 (NEP 2020)" on July 29, 2020, outlining the country's future educational system. By 2040, the goal of the strategy is to change the Indian educational system. Shortly after the idea was made public, the government made it clear that no one would be compelled to learn a specific language, and that English would not be replaced by any regional language as the primary language of teaching. The implementation of the NEP language policy is left to the governments, institutions, and schools; it is a comprehensive set of guidelines and recommendations. In India, education is classified as a concurrent list topic.

(Kumarasamy & Saikumari, 2023) [9] Through the provision of necessary infrastructure support and crucial curriculum modifications that include the inclusion of materials on human values such as respect for all people, "empathy, tolerance, human rights, gender equality, non-violence, global citizenship, inclusion, and equity", National Educational Policy 2020 places a strong emphasis on learning by all. "The National Educational Policy 2020's" several facets of inclusive education are discussed in this article, along with its noteworthy influence on India's inclusive educational landscape.

(Digvijay Singh & Mishra, 2023)[11] Marginalised populations and disabled children are targeted via inclusive and equitable education methods under NEP 2020. NEP 2020 and RTE 2009 comply with the constitution. Addressing implementation issues like resource allocation and fair distribution is necessary. India's constitutional framework and NEP 2020 support fair and inclusive education, demonstrating the nation's commitment to social development and inclusive progress. This review-based paper uses the Systematic Literature Review (SLR) method to highlight fundamental constitutional provisions related to education theories learnt in this course on Contemporary Themes in Education Policy and analyse the "National Education Policy 2020" text. By considering Indian Constitutional provisions, this thesis illuminates national educational policy. This helps policymakers find document gaps and opportunities for improvement.

3 Conclusion

The National Education Policy 2020 (NEP 2020) presents a transformative approach to achieving inclusive education in India, addressing key challenges such as lack of participation, limited opportunities, inadequate infrastructure, and the need for a more humane education system. Despite previous policies like NPE-1968, NPE-1986, PoA-1992, NCF-2005, and RTE-2009 emphasizing inclusivity, gaps in implementation have hindered their effectiveness in regular classrooms. NEP 2020, however, offers renewed hope through structured reforms, including the Integrated Teacher Education Program (ITEP), specialized B.Ed. programs, and comprehensive pre-service and in-service teacher training initiatives aimed at equipping educators with the necessary skills for inclusive pedagogy. While NEP 2020 has made notable progress in promoting digital tools and inclusive teaching methodologies, persistent issues remain, such as insufficient infrastructure, inadequate teacher training, and unequal

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access to resources, particularly for marginalized communities. The policy's success hinges on removing barriers from learning environments, enhancing administrative frameworks, refining curriculum and evaluation strategies, and fostering a highly qualified teaching workforce. NEP 2020 shifts the focus from equality to equity, ensuring that every student, regardless of socio-economic background, has the opportunity to pursue education aligned with their interests and capabilities. By addressing systemic disparities and fostering equitable learning environments, NEP 2020 paves the way for a truly inclusive education system that upholds the fundamental right to education and empowers all learners to thrive in a rapidly evolving world.

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