

# Inclusive Education and NEP 2020: An Analysis

**Dr. Meghna Arora**

Asst. Prof., Dept. of Sociology, Vardhaman College, Bijnor (U.P.) India.

## ABSTRACT

*Education is the gateway for children to fully participate and contribute constructively to the progress of society. It has been considered as the most potent factor that improves the life-chances of children with disabilities. However, unfortunately, many children with disabilities cannot be benefitted of this opportunity because they have to face a lot of obstacles owing to their exclusion and marginalisation by the society. Apart from the inaccessible infrastructure and lack of information, policies and institutions; discrimination, antipathy and social norms also play a major role in containing their growth as a self-dependent individual. The National Education Policy (NEP), 2020 is an ambitious plan of structural reforms in the education system; which has been adopted by the Government of India in July 2020 after a period of 34 years. It aims to fill the gaps between the current learning outcomes and what is required to make the educational system excellent, equitable and ethical. It aspires to move beyond the goals of previous educational policies – NPE 1968 and NPE 1986, and their unfinished agenda of inclusion in education of the children with disabilities. The present paper attempts to analyse the key recommendations of NEP 2020, and records some of the key challenges that the policy may encounter on its route to achieve its goal of inclusive education.*

**Keywords:** NEP 2020, Inclusive education, Children with disability, Indian context

## I INTRODUCTION

The National Education Policy (NEP), 2020 is an ambitious plan of structural reforms in the education system; which has been adopted by the Government of India in July 2020 after a period of 34 years. It aims to fill the gaps between the current learning outcomes and what is required to make the educational system excellent, equitable and ethical. It aspires to move beyond the goals of previous educational policies – NPE 1968 and NPE 1986, and their unfinished agenda of inclusion in education of the children with disabilities. The National Policy of Education, 1968, primarily focused on the radical reconstruction of the education system and to strengthen national integration, while National Policy of Education, 1986, stressed upon equality and life-long education.

By 2040, the policy intends to accomplish an educational system that is second to none in the world, by making the educational system accessible, unbiased and inclusive from early childhood care to the levels of higher education. It has proposed many innovative and creative notions and initiatives to revamp all the aspects of the educational structure that is in consonance with the ambitious goals of the Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4) adopted by India in 2015.

The SDG seeks to 'ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all by 2030' (NEP, 2020, p.3). The Government of India, as one of the committed members of the United Nations, has agreed through this policy to fulfil the aim to bridge 'the social category gaps in access, participation, and learning outcomes in school

education' (NEP, 2020, p.24) as well as higher educational levels. The NEP 2020 has proposed a framework for the education of the People with Disabilities (PWD), as one of the most vulnerable group among them, under the notion of 'Inclusive Education'. This Policy aligns completely with the provisions of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (RPWD) Act, 2016 and endorses all its recommendations with regard to their education.

The present paper attempts to analyse the key recommendations of NEP 2020, and records some of the key challenges that the policy may encounter on its route to achieve its goal of inclusive education.

## II INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

The United Nations **Convention on the Rights of the Child** (UNCRC, 1989) states, 'the child should be fully prepared to live an individual life in society, and brought up in the spirit of the ideals proclaimed in the Charter of the United Nations, and in particular in the spirit of peace, dignity, tolerance, freedom, equality and solidarity'.

Education is the gateway for children to fully participate and contribute constructively to the progress of society. It has been considered as the most potent factor that improves the life-chances of children with disabilities. However, many children with disabilities cannot be benefitted of this opportunity because they have to face a lot of obstacles owing to their exclusion and marginalisation by the society. Apart from the inaccessible infrastructure and lack of information, policies and institutions; discrimination, antipathy and social norms also

play a major role in containing their growth as a self-dependent individual.

Daniel Mont contends, 'When children with disabilities are excluded from education, they may face a lifetime of exclusion' (Mont, 2021, p.28). Because they are less likely to be educated, employed and own families, and participate in community life. Therefore, excluding or preventing the children with disabilities from participating fully in the community life, ultimately, costs exorbitantly to the society. 'If these children lack the opportunity to be productive, society loses out on what they could have produced'. (ibid., p.1)

Deon Filmer (2008) in their study of 11 developing countries observed that disability is more deterrent than gender or socio-economic class to the rate of enrolment of children with disabilities in education. Hence, it can be deciphered from this that the children with disabilities are less likely to start their education. Even if they do, they encounter several barriers during learning like ineffective pedagogy and incompatible curriculum which may lag behind their requirements. As a result, these children are less likely to succeed in regular schools. Generally, they are segregated into special schools where expectations and opportunities to learn are limited.

Daniel Mont (2021) notes that despite the provisions of universal primary education in some countries, children with disabilities of those countries show a disproportionate tendency of dropping out of the schools. This clearly indicates that 'policies to improve educational access do not effectively reach these children' (Mont, 2021, p.6).

Banks and Polack (2014), stresses upon the inclusion in education of the children with disabilities. They assert that education and economic growth are positively interconnected or correlated with each other. The improvement in educational coverage helps in reducing the reliance on social protection schemes, which eventually increases the government revenues.

### III THE CONCEPTUAL BACKGROUND

There are basically three types of education systems around the world for children with disabilities:

**(a) Segregated education:** In this type of education system, students with disabilities study in segregated settings specifically created for them in the form of 'special schools'. However, this system of education considers the child as a problem; hence, a totally different form of

education is provided to them which is limited in nature.

**(b) Integrated education:** This form of education is similar to inclusive education, but without any ideological commitment to equity. Though these students learn in a regular classroom with some superficial adaptations and resources, they are required to 'fit in' with pre-existing structures, attitudes and an unaltered environment. However, in the absence of any paradigm shift within the school, these students are not perceived as equals. In other words, they are not included, but only integrated in the school.

**(c) Inclusive education:** In this form of education, every child with or without disability learn together in the same classroom, same curricula and participates in the activities as equal. This system reaches out to all learners and strengthens their unique capacities. It requires restructuring of culture, policies and practices in the schools to suit the requirements of the students. Teachers and administrators are required to make the adjustments in their curriculum and pedagogical practices so that all students benefit. It is based on the notion of 'celebrating and respecting the diversity'.

### IV INCLUSION IN EDUCATION IN INDIA

The Rights of Persons with Disabilities (RPWD) Act, 2016 forms the background or base for the newly approved National Education Policy, 2020. The Act defines inclusive education as a 'system of education wherein students with or 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' (NEP 2020, p.26).

O'Keefe (2007) reported that 'In India, nearly 40% of children with disabilities were not enrolled in school, compared with between 8% and 10% of children in Scheduled Tribes or Castes. The overall enrolment rate was over 90%'.

The Census 2011 report also presents a grim picture of the conditions of the children with disabilities (CwD). According to it, in contrast to 26% of the whole population of India, 45% of disabled people are illiterate. And, only 59% of the disabled people complete their education up to Class X, in comparison to 67% of the general population.

Moreover, the progress of *Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan*, which endorses free and compulsory education for all children between the ages of 6 and 14, has consistently been marred by the prevalence of dropouts among the children with disability. The National Sample Survey of Out-of-School Children between 6 and 13 years of age (2014) reported that an 'estimated 28.07% children with special needs are out of school' (p.7). Further, there is a pattern of dropouts among the *Divyangs* or children with disability which shows that children with more than one disability (44%), with mental (36%) and speech (35%) disability are more likely to be out-of-school in comparison to the children with either hearing/orthopaedic/ locomotive/visual or any other kind of disability, which accounts for only 20-30% (Salve &Yadavar, 2017).

## V HISTORY OF INCLUSION IN EDUCATION IN INDIA: FROM EXCLUSION TO INCLUSION

The journey of inclusion of Children with Disability (CwD) in education has proceeded with the changes in societal attitudes towards them. This process of societal change in the perception can be seen to be passing through three phases or eras. Initially, the attitude of exclusion, extermination, neglect and denial prevailed predominantly in societies towards this vulnerable group of people. Gradually, a shift towards 'segregation and sympathy' became widespread. Consequentially, a number of institutions and centres were started as 'Special Schools' for educating them in accordance with their potentials and talents. Nevertheless, it could not achieve its purpose of elevating their social status and dignity. Hence, after many battles – legal and socio-political – a process of 'integration and inclusion' in to the social system has begun. Many treaties have been made at the international level.

In Indian history of inclusion of Children with Disability can be classified into two major periods of Pre-independence and Post-independence.

(a) **Pre-independence period:** During this period, prior to the Colonial period, The *Gurukul* system of education prevailed, which was sensitive enough towards the requirements of these people. A tradition of sympathy, protection and caring attitude for the disabled people predominated since ancient period. Saints like Ashtvarka, Surdas, and others are admired despite being physically disabled.

During the British period these people were neglected. Later, with the efforts of the sympathisers and missionaries some Acts and legislations were approved to deal with the disability issues like – Indian Penal Code 1860, Indian Contract Act 1872, The Lunacy Act, 1912 and The Lepers Act 1898. Further, some centres for educating this excluded group were also started – Special school for the deaf in 1883, for the blind in 1887, for the children with mental retardation (currently called intellectual disability) in 1941 were all landmark developments. Christian missionaries played a pivotal role in spearheading these centres.

(b) **Post-independence period:** After independence, Indian government took various positive steps towards the education of the People with Disabilities. Some of the major steps are as follows:

- (i) **Constitution of India:** under Fundamental rights ensured all the citizens of non-discrimination and equality of opportunity (**Article 15(1)**) and guaranteed the right to life and liberty (**Article 21**). **Article 45** stated for free and compulsory universal primary education for all children upto 14 years of age;
- (ii) **Budgetary allocation** for PwD in various 5-year Plans ;
- (iii) **Indian Education Commission or Kothari Commission (1964 – 66)** recognised the need of integration of the children with disabilities in education;
- (iv) **Integrated Education of the Disabled Children (IEDC), 1974** provided "financial support for books, school uniforms, transportation, special equipment and aids," with the intention of using these aids to include children in mainstream classrooms; xcvi .
- (v) **National Policy on Education (NPE), 1986:** It provided the opportunity to the children with 'mild disabilities' to learn and be included in the regular schools while with 'moderate to severe disabilities' in the special schools. It was implemented only with the **Programme of Action, 1992**. The Process of integration of Children with Disabilities (CwD) in regular schools gained momentum with the introduction of this policy;
- (vi) **District Primary Education Programme (DPEP), 1997:** It focused on the inclusion of children with mild to moderate disabilities into the regular schools. The Government of India and the World Bank jointly ventured this

initiative with the aim of 'education for all'.

- (vii) **Right to Education (RTE), 2005**: It made the education as a compulsory right of every child between 6-14 years of age. **Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA), 2002** and **Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan (RMSA), 2009** expanded significantly in the field of inclusive education of CwD.

## VI INCLUSIVE EDUCATION IN NEP 2020: KEY FEATURES AND CHALLENGES

The NEP 2020 envisages 'providing high-quality of education to all that is equitable and inclusive; thereby making India a global knowledge superpower' (NEP 2020, p.6). For realizing the goal of inclusion in education, it has identified multiplicity of factors, particularly pertaining to infrastructural and attitudinal inadequacies that dissuade the rates of enrolment and retention of the Children with Disabilities (CwD) or *Divyangs* at all the levels of education. NEP 2020 incorporates certain **key recommendations** for bridging the gaps in access, participation and learning outcomes of Children with disabilities to address these issues:

- (a) It accords highest priority to the creation of mechanisms, which will facilitate inclusion and equality of participation of children with disabilities in regular schooling process from the early childhood to higher education.
- (b) To continue with the policies and schemes that have been fruitful in the past in increasing the enrolment and retention of the targeted group, such as scholarship, incentivizing with cash, etc.
- (c) In consonance with RPWD Act, 2016, the policy recommends to provide resources for the integration to the as per the requirements of the school complexes; such as special educators with cross-disability training and the establishment of resource centres wherever it is needed.
- (d) It lays out to support school complexes for accommodating and facilitating incorporation of mechanisms designed as per RPWD Act, 2016 to give barrier free access and ensure full participation of the CwD in the classroom.
- (e) It proposes to change the pedagogy to enliven the environment of the classroom by incorporating assistive devices and appropriate technology-based tools as well as adequate and language-appropriate teaching-learning materials (e.g., textbooks in accessible formats such as large print and Braille) for CwD, and promoting integration with their teachers and peers.
- (f) It recommends assigning National Institute of Open Schooling (NIOS) with the responsibility to develop high-quality modules to teach Indian Sign Language to teach other basic subjects.
- (g) The policy sanctions the freedom to CwD to choose between regular or special schooling, as their convenience. It also approves home-based schooling for the learners with severe or multiple disabilities. To support the quality assured education and skilling to the learners at home, it proposes to engage special educators in conjunction with resource centres.
- (h) It makes the provision of 'Inclusion Fund'. This fund will be administered by states to strategize the inclusion in education of these children. The fund will help in initiating steps to mitigate the barriers by improving the accessibility of the school building and sanitation, adding relevant study material in the library, physical conditions of laboratories, conditional cash transfers, etc. To address context-specific issues at the local level, the fund will support the effective interventions participation in education.
- (i) This policy also encourages the CwD to study at their own pace, opt for curriculum in accordance with their strengths (curricula flexibility), and use effective technology.
- (j) For formulating new guidelines for appropriate assessment and certification for CwD, the policy suggests to engage National Assessment Centre, PARAKH. Ensuring safety and security of children are some of the actions that are encouraged by this policy.
- (k) To sensitise and build the capacities of teacher to teach basic subjects to children with specific disabilities with alternative pedagogical practices will be an integral part of all teacher education programmes. Further, teachers will be trained to recognize and categorize the learning disabilities in children early on and to help children with learning disabilities succeed in education and take care of their mental health.

Although the policy amply recognizes the necessity of inclusion of CwD into the mainstream education systems, and largely supports the objectives of the RPWD Act, 2016 as well, but it fails to address some **gaps or challenges** of crucial importance.

- The policy does not clearly illustrate about the roadmap for its implementation. Often, well-intentioned policies have failed due to lack of proper planning and strategies for implementation.
- The policy overlooks the ground realities of the education system, and lack of accommodation and inclusion. It fails to recognize the fact that most of the teachers are not or poorly trained for such special assignments. Further, it also misses to take into account that most of the schools are utterly understaffed.
- The policy has not clearly defined and distinguished ‘mild’, ‘moderate’ and ‘severe’ forms of disability.
- Curriculum is another point in question between children with or without disabilities. In today’s times of fiercely competitive environments, it does not mention what and how changes in curriculum would be integrated without pressurizing but accommodating, and assuring the children with disabilities do not feel excluded.
- The policy fails to provide the utility and accuracy of the alternative and reliable methods in assessing the potentials of the CwD in contrast to the prevailing system evaluation.
- The policy does not clarify about the mechanisms of alternative home-schooling for children with severe disabilities so as to make it comparable with regular schooling. The idea appears to be a bit unrealistic.
- School buildings, that are currently available, are largely inaccessible to the CwD. To make them ‘barrier free’ is going to be a cumbersome and expensive affair for a country with so limited resources.
- Funding is a much larger issue for any policy to succeed. The policy does not clearly strategize and falls through on this point.
- Apart from the above mentioned gaps or challenges, the policy does not provide any guidelines on the strategies to be applied to overcome negative paradigm around children with disabilities to make the society inclusive in all aspects.

## VII CONCLUSION

The NEP 2020, since its introduction, has been at the centre of many debates and deliberations in the academic world across the country. It has opened up new vistas in the field of education by revising and refurbishing all the facets of the education structure. It has focused its attention more on learning to learn rather than only on learning. It has stressed upon shifting the paradigm in all the aspects of learning such as, pedagogy, curriculum and orientation. The NEP 2020 gave due recognition to ‘inclusive education’ as a creative and innovative step forward to effect changes in the prevailing education system to overcome the dismal conditions of the people with disabilities. It has recognised its importance in containing the declining rates of drop-outs and retention among the children with disability at all the levels of education system. It has also included several measures to improve the life-chances and empower the people with disabilities as equals. Though these efforts intended in the policy are appreciable and laudable, yet, as and when it will be applied at the ground-levels, many roadblocks will have to be confronted and addressed for realising its goal of ‘equity and inclusion’. Thus, it can be said that though, with the introduction of NEP 2020, the ball has started rolling, but there is yet a lot to be achieved.

## REFERENCES

- [1] Banks, L. M. and Polack, S. (2014). The Economic Costs of Exclusion and Gains of Inclusion of People with Disabilities: Evidence from low and middle income countries. CBM, International Centre for Evidence in Disability, London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine: London. Retrieved from : [www.cbm.org](http://www.cbm.org)
- [2] Dr. Anuja (2020). NEP 2020: Making education more inclusive, *Times of India*, August 18. Retrieved from: <https://timesofindia.ndiatimes.com/blogs/voices/nep-2020-making-education-more-inclusive/>
- [3] Filmer, D. (2008). Disability, Poverty, and Schooling in Developing Countries: Results from 14 household surveys. *The World Bank Economic Review*, Vol. 22 no. 1. Retrieved from: [elibrary.worldbank.org](http://elibrary.worldbank.org).

- [4] Khan, J. and Sahoo, N. (2020). Equitable and inclusive vision in National Education Policy: A critique, August 24. Retrieved from: <https://www.orfonline.org/expert-speak/equitable-and-inclusive-vision-in-the-nep-2020/>
- [5] Mont, D. (2021). Combatting the Costs of Exclusion for Children with Disabilities and their Families. United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF): New York. Retrieved from: [www.unicef.org](http://www.unicef.org)
- [6] O'Keefe, P. (2007). People with Disabilities from India: From commitments to outcomes (English). Washington, D.C.: World Bank Group. Retrieved from: <https://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/358151468268839622/People-with-disabilites-in-India-from-commitments-to-outcomes>.
- [7] Salve, P. &Yadavgar, S. (2017). Why nearly half of India's population is illiterate. Scroll.in. Retrieved from: <https://amp.scroll.in/article/833784/why-12-1-million-45-indians-with-special-needs-are-illiterate/>.
- [8] Convention on the rights of the Child. United Nations Human Rights. Retrieved from: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/crc.aspx>
- [9] IGNOU e-content.(2017).Diversity and Inclusion. *BES-128Creating an inclusive school*. Director, School of education, IGNOU: New Delhi. Retrieved from: IGNOU e-content
- [10] National Education Policy 2020. Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India. Retrieved from: <https://www.education.gov.in>