

National Education Policy 2020 and Disability

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Abstract:

Education is key for achieving full human potential, developing an equitable society and promoting national development. Universal high-quality education is the best way forward for developing and maximizing our country's rich talents and resources for the good of the individual, the society, the country, and the world. India will have the highest population of young people in the world over the next decade, and our ability to provide high-quality educational opportunities to them will determine the future of our country.

The New Education Policy-2020 is an important document that has attractive provision to ensure the quality education for the students of the country. As the policy also concerns the welfare and education of children with disability, therefore this policy will play very important role in ensuring the education of the children with disability. It is expected to meet the student's requirement regarding quality education, innovation and research to make this country a knowledge superpower. Under the New Education Policy, all teacher education programs will include instruction on how to teach children with specific disability. The latest provision in the New Education Policy-(NEP) 2020, approved by India's Union Cabinet in July 2020, encourages, and promotes "Barrier-free access to Education for all Children with Disabilities". The new policy suggests many fundamental principles that will guide the education system at large, as well as the individual institutions within to inclusion of all children in education system. The policy has a number of sections and in each section equity and inclusion has been underscored.

Keywords: *Disability, NEP 2020, CWSN, Barrier-Free, Quality, Equality, Disability Act, Inclusive Education*

Introduction:

National Education Policy- 2020 envisions an education system rooted in Indian ethos that contributes directly to transforming India sustainably into an equitable and vibrant knowledge society, by providing high-quality education to all, and thereby making India a global knowledge superpower. The Policy envisages that the curriculum and pedagogy of our institutions must develop among the students a deep sense of respect towards the Fundamental Duties and Constitutional values, bonding with one's country, and a conscious awareness of one's roles and responsibilities in a changing world.

The global education development agenda reflected in the Goal 4 (SDG4) of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, adopted by India in 2015 - seeks to “ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all” by 2030. Such a important goal will require the entire education system to be reconfigured to support and foster learning, so that all of the critical targets and goals (SDGs) of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development can be achieved. The Policy also recognizes the importance of creating enabling mechanisms for providing Children with Special Needs (CWSN) Divyang, the same opportunities of obtaining quality education as any other child. NEP-2020 suggests many fundamental principles to inclusion of all children in education. These principles are (1) Recognizing, identifying, and fostering the unique capabilities of each student (2) Respect for diversity (3) Full equity and inclusion.

The Rights of Persons with Disabilities (RPWD) Act 2016 defines inclusive education as 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 Policy is in complete consonance with the provisions of the RPWD Act 2016 and endorses all its recommendations with regard to school education. While preparing the National Curriculum Framework, NCERT will ensure that consultations are held with expert bodies such as National Institutes for the disabled. Assistive equipment, relevant technology-based tools, and language-appropriate teaching-learning materials will be made accessible to accommodate this new addition to the NEP. NIOS will also get high-quality modules for teaching Indian Sign Language and other core topics in Indian Sign Language. Because children with benchmark disabilities, as defined by the RPWD Act 2016, will have the option of attending regular or special school, resource

centers, as well as special teachers and trainers, will be available to meet the various rehabilitation and educational needs of students with severe or multiple disabilities.

The focus has been laid down on open schooling, appropriate infrastructure, and suitable usage of technological interventions to ensure access for the disabled students. A prime focal point of the NEP was on early childhood care and education (ECCE), and emphasis has been laid down on the need for prioritizing the inclusion of children with disabilities in ECCE. Safety of the disabled students, recruitment of educators with cross-disability training, emphasis on the availability of textbooks in large print and Braille, and Analysis of Knowledge for Holistic Development, etc. have been envisaged. The schools and school grounds will be aided under the NEP 2020 by providing resources to include children with disabilities and appointing special Educators and trainers who are specially trained to bring positive change in scholastic and co scholastic domains of CWSN.

Provisions of NEP- 2020 for students with disabilities:

National Education Policy, 2020 ensures 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. NIOS will develop high-quality modules to teach Indian Sign Language and to teach other basic subjects using ISL.

NCERT has been asked to consult the Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities before formulating a curriculum for students so that its recommendations are also implemented. Neighborhood schools, special schools, and home-based education- as options for the education of children with disabilities, as a step towards resolving ambiguities towards school choices which arose during the Right to Education Act, 2009, 2012 amendment of the RTE Act and The RPwD Act, 2016. Resource centers in conjunction with special educators will support the rehabilitation and educational needs of learners with severe or multiple disabilities. Other provisions like non-discrimination in schools, accessible infrastructure, reasonable accommodations, individualized supports, use of Braille and Indian Sign Language in teaching, and monitoring have been included in NEP 2020.

Bridging the gap of Inequality in NEP-2020:

The National Educational Policy (NEP) 2020 aims to address the country's education system's rising inequality and injustice. The NEP 2020 recognizes significant dropout rates among socio-economic strata and disadvantaged minorities, among other things. More crucially, impediments that contribute to inefficient resource allocations, such as tiny school campuses and reasons for the female child's lower involvement in rural regions, are being recognised. It also highlights the unmet educational requirements of children who live in difficult-to-reach areas. The gap between the current state of learning outcomes and what is required must be bridged through undertaking major reforms that bring the highest quality, equity, and integrity into the system, from early childhood care and education through higher education. The aim must be for India to have an education system by 2040 that is second to none, with equitable access to the highest-quality education for all learners regardless of social or economic background.

Curriculum and Pedagogy for holistic and integrated learning:

All efforts will be made early on to ensure that any gaps that exist between the language spoken by the child and the medium of teaching are bridged. In cases where home language/mother tongue textbook material is not available, the language of transaction between teachers and students will still remain the home language/mother tongue wherever possible.

The Rights of Persons with Disabilities (RPWD) Act 2016 defines inclusive education as 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 Policy is in complete consonance with the provisions of the RPWD Act 2016 and endorses all its recommendations with regard to school education. While preparing the National Curriculum Framework, NCERT will ensure that consultations are held with expert bodies such as National Institutes of DEPwD.

The Assessment and certification agencies, including the proposed new National Assessment Centre, PARAKH, will formulate guidelines and recommend appropriate tools for conducting such assessments, from the foundational stage to higher education (including

for entrance exams), in order to ensure equitable access and opportunities for all students with learning disabilities.

Requirement of Special educators/instructors:

There is an urgent need for additional special educators for certain areas of school education. Some examples of such specialist requirements include subject teaching for children with disabilities at the Middle and Secondary school level, including teaching for specific learning disabilities. Such teachers would require not only subject-teaching knowledge and understanding of subject-related aims of education, but also the relevant skills for understanding of special requirements of children. Further, it has now been mandated under the NEP, 2020 that the B.Ed. programs would also impart training to teachers on teaching children with disabilities or those with special interests and talents.

The NEP, 2020 could have provided for a major and a minor in B. Ed which would have given the teachers to opt for one subject that they wanted to specialize in and another as their minor. 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 more specialized areas of teaching, such as the teaching of students with disabilities.

Special Education Zones (SEZs):

The Policy recommends that regions of the country with large populations from educationally-disadvantaged SEDGs should be declared Special Education Zones (SEZs), where all the schemes and policies are implemented to the maximum through additional concerted efforts, in order to truly change their educational landscape. In addition, there have been various successful policies and schemes such as targeted scholarships, conditional cash transfers to incentivize parents to send their children to school, providing bicycles for transport, etc., that have significantly increased participation of SEDGs in the schooling system in certain areas. These successful policies and schemes must be significantly strengthened across the country.

Ensuring the inclusion and equal participation of children with disabilities in ECCE and the schooling system will also be accorded the highest priority. Children with disabilities will be enabled to fully participate in the regular schooling process from the Foundational Stage to higher education.

Provisions in RPWD Act, 2016:

The right to education is an integral facet of the guarantee of equal rights for children with disabilities and their social inclusion. NEP 2020 is in complete consonance with the provisions of the RPWD Act 2016 and endorses all its recommendations with regard to school education considering inclusive education as 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. Some recommendations in the NEP-2020 are Barrier free access for all children with disabilities, assistive devices and language-appropriate teaching-learning materials (e.g., textbooks in accessible formats such as large print and Braille). The policy also provides option for Children with benchmark disabilities to choose between regular or special schooling and Home-based education (for children with severe and profound disabilities who are unable to go to schools). Resource centers will support the rehabilitation and educational needs of learners with severe or multiple disabilities and will assist parents/guardians in achieving high-quality home schooling and skilling for such students as needed.

Conclusion

NEP 2020 emphasizes upon inculcating Inclusive educational structure and inclusive educational culture in our school education system through infrastructural support and by making corresponding changes in curriculum incorporating materials on human values such as respect for all persons, human rights, gender equality, non-violence, inclusion, and equity. There is a need to go further, to recognize disability as an identity and as a form of diversity rather than solely a deficit. The educational challenges of children with disabilities stem from a rigid curriculum, inaccessible schools and classrooms, absence of modified assessments, and deficit perspectives that place limits on what disabled children can achieve.



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